BLAKE R. WOLFE

FAEHEART

WIDDERSHINS ACADEMY: BOOK TWO

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WIDDERSHINS ACADEMY #2

BLAKE R. WOLFE

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CHAPTER 1

ELIAS

The problem with having everything is knowing exactly how much you have to lose.

I stared out the window of the Thorne estate in Northern California, watching as the gardeners, a mixture of bound elementals and human staff, trimmed the impossibly perfect hedges into even more perfect shapes. Mother insisted they be crafted to resemble the great magical beasts of old. There were phoenixes, griffins, and dragons galore in the garden. In fact, the topiary dragon exhaled a small plume of actual fire, an enchantment Father had added last spring that he was particularly proud of. It was the most excitement I had to look forward to most days.

"Elias, darling, are you listening?" Mother's voice cut through my thoughts, precise as a silver athame.

"Yes, Mother," I replied automatically, turning away from the window. The formal dining room stretched before me, all dark mahogany and crystal chandeliers that had been in the Thorne family for generations.

"As I was saying, your father and I have discussed your final year at Widdershins. We expect nothing less than excellence, particularly in Advanced Conjuration. The Blackwood woman speaks highly of your potential." She sipped her tea, pinky extended, not a hair out of place in her immaculate chignon.

"Yes, Mother." The words felt worn from overuse.

"The Cromwell boy won't be returning, I hear. Such a shame about Damien. Powerful bloodline, if a bit... unconventional in his methods." Her lips pursed slightly. "His son… What was his name?"

"Caden," I supplied.

"Yes, Caden. Frightfully shy thing when I met him. Nothing like his father." She waved her hand dismissively. "In any case, you'll be the most powerful witch in your year. You must represent the Thorne name accordingly."

I nodded, staring at my untouched scone. Two months sailing the magical currents between Singapore and California, attending formal dinners with other prominent witch families, practicing prescribed spells under Father's watchful eye, and still, I felt as empty as when we'd left.

Was that all my life was going to be? A never-ending series of parties, careful magic, and polite conversation? As I stared out the window, I felt as if I'd already lived the entire thing. And to be honest, I found it wanting.

Not that I'd ever say that out loud.

"Elias." Father's voice boomed from the doorway. He strode in with purpose, his tailored robes swishing around his ankles. "I've just received word from the Dean. The curriculum this year will include a special project. You'll be part of an independent study for those with sufficient power."

Mother's eyes lit up, the way they always did when there was an opportunity for me to showcase the Thorne family superiority. "How marvelous! What perfect timing. Elias has been practicing diligently all summer."

I hadn't, not really. I'd gone through the motions, of course, but my heart hadn't been in it. The structured spells Father insisted upon felt like chains rather than channels for my magic.

"It's an excellent opportunity," Father continued, taking his seat at the head of the table. He snapped his fingers, and a conjured servant appeared with his morning coffee. "Only three students have been selected."

"And Elias is one of them," Mother said, not a question but a statement of fact.

Father nodded. "Along with someone I've never heard of and..." He paused, frowning slightly. "Caden Cromwell."

I nearly choked on the sip of tea I'd finally taken. "Caden? But I thought he wasn't returning."

Mother's perfectly sculpted eyebrows drew together. "I thought you said—"

"Apparently," Father cut in, "the boy has shown unexpected promise. After Damien's passing, certain... abilities have manifested."

The way he said it made my skin prickle. There was something Father wasn't saying, something important.

"What kind of independent study?" I asked, suddenly interested in a way I hadn't been in months.

Father's eyes gleamed. "Ancient magic. Pre-colonial. The kind that doesn't follow the rules we've established."

Mother's teacup clattered against its saucer. "Surely you don't mean—"

"Wild magic," Father confirmed. "Untamed, raw power. The kind the first witches channeled before we codified our practices."

My heart raced. Wild magic was forbidden at Widdershins except in theoretical study. It was unpredictable, dangerous, and utterly fascinating.

"I don't know if that's appropriate," Mother began, but Father silenced her with a look.

"The Thorne family has always led magical innovation," he said firmly. "And Elias is more than capable of handling this challenge. Aren't you, son?"

It wasn't really a question. It never was with Father. But for once, I found myself genuinely wanting what was being offered to me.

"Yes, Father," I replied, and this time, the words had my approval behind them.

Later that afternoon, as I packed my suitcases for the return to Widdershins, I found myself pausing over an old photograph. It had been taken three years ago, at the Winter Solstice Gala on campus. I was a freshman then and new to Widdershins Academy. There were several friends around me, witches from high-ranking families like me, that were trying to make their parents proud.

That was the year I felt most like myself. It was my first time out of the house and on my own. I allowed myself to cut loose a little, to have some fun. But when my grades came in at the end of the year and I'd gotten less than top marks in my evocation class, my parents nearly lost their minds.

That summer that followed was one of the hardest of my life. My father took it upon himself to drill me day and night in every bit of magic he thought I *should* know. Meanwhile, what little free time I did have was chaperoned by my mother, who decided she needed to find the *right sort of friends* for me to be involved with.

Since that summer, I'd not gone to a party on campus, hung out with friends outside of mealtimes, or done anything except homework, it seemed. The professors were given special instructions to keep me busy, and that's exactly what they did. Because of all that, I was one of the strongest witches at the academy. But also, one that nobody would miss should I not come back to school for my senior year.

I set the photograph down and continued packing, methodically folding each robe and organizing my ritual components by elemental correspondence. Mother insisted on this system. Fire elements went into red silk pouches, water in blue, and so on. It was efficient, I had to admit, but sometimes I wondered what it might be like to just... throw things in a bag and go.

A soft knock interrupted my thoughts.

"Come in," I called, closing the silver clasp on my enchanted luggage.

Varina, our house witch, entered with a small wooden box in her hands. Though technically our servant, she'd been with the family since before I was born and sometimes felt more like an aunt than staff.

"Your grandmother asked me to bring you this to you when the time was right," she said, her voice low as if sharing a secret. She set the box on my desk, her weathered hands lingering on the carved lid. "Considering your acceptance into this special project, I think now is the time."

"What is it?" I asked, approaching cautiously. Magic emanated from the box in subtle waves. It was old magic, not the clean, sterile kind Father typically approved of.

Varina's eyes twinkled. "Some of your grandmother's personal things. It's from a time before the Thorne family became quite so... structured."

My curiosity piqued, I reached for the box, but Varina placed her hand over mine.

"Your father doesn't know what's in here," she whispered. "Your grandmother was not always the proper witch your parents remember. She had... adventures. And ambition. And talent… so much talent."

"Adventures?" The word tasted foreign and exciting on my tongue.

Varina nodded, a small smile playing at the corners of her mouth. "The Thornes weren't always about perfect hedges and formal teas, you know. There was a time when your family's name inspired both awe and a little fear." She patted my hand. "Don't tell your mother I said that."

"Thank you, Varina," I said, holding the box in my trembling hands. "I'll keep it a secret."

"Good idea," she smiled, patting me on the shoulder. "Now finish your packing and don't forget to have a little fun this year, okay?"

I smiled, pulling her in for a quick hug. "Thank you."

After she left, I opened the box carefully. Inside lay an assortment of items that looked nothing like the pristine magical tools I was accustomed to. There was a small bone knife with strange carvings along the handle, a vial of what appeared to be quicksilver but moved with too much purpose, and a leather-bound journal, its pages yellowed with age.

I picked up the journal, feeling a jolt of connection as my fingers touched the worn cover. Opening to a random page, I found spells written in my grandmother's flowing script. They were spells unlike *any* I'd studied at Widdershins. Spells with emotion woven into their very construction, with variables rather than constants, with room for improvisation.

Wild magic.

My pulse quickened as I flipped through more pages. This wasn't the rigid, formulaic magic my father practiced. This was magic that breathed and adapted, that required the witch to be fully present rather than merely precise. It was more like a prayer and less like writing an equation.

A folded piece of paper slipped from between the pages. I unfolded it to find a photograph I'd never seen before—my grandmother, young and vibrant, her hair flowing freely around her shoulders. She was standing arm-in-arm with a tall, willowy figure whose features seemed to shift the longer I stared. The stranger's hair appeared to be made of autumn leaves and copper wire, their eyes unnaturally bright against skin that seemed to glow from within. A fae. My grandmother had known a fae. Not only that, she was standing in front of the Seelie Court, a place not in our world.

On the back of the photograph, in the same flowing script as the journal, were the words: "*Briar Hall, Summer Solstice. The night I learned that rules are merely suggestions to those brave enough to bend them.*"

I sat heavily on my bed, the photograph trembling in my hands. Everything I'd been taught about the fae, their dangerous beauty, their trickster ways, their wild, untamed magic, rushed through my mind. And here was my grandmother, looking happier than I'd ever seen her in family portraits, embracing one.

Had Father seen this? Did he know?

Sure, there were a few fae students at school, but even friendships were rare between my kind and theirs. Outside of the academy, it was even more so. Witches kept to the mortal plane. Fae, on the other hand, had a tendency to return to their own plane of existence where they could be wild and free with reckless abandon. From what little I'd studied, it seemed like a chaotic place where humans, even magical ones, stood little chance of surviving.

The sound of my mother's heels clicking down the hallway sent me scrambling to return everything to the box. I slipped the journal into my personal satchel instead, heart hammering as if I'd committed some terrible transgression. Perhaps I had.

"Elias?" Mother called through the door. "The car will be ready in twenty minutes. Do be punctual."

"Yes, Mother," I replied, voice steadier than I felt.

After she moved on, I sat staring at the wooden box, its contents now a secret between me and my long-dead grandmother. Something shifted inside me. There was a curiosity, a hunger for something beyond the carefully curated life I'd been living.

Wild magic. Pre-colonial practices. And now, a hint that my family's past wasn't as pristine as my parents pretended. For the first time in years, I felt a genuine thrill of anticipation about returning to Widdershins Academy.

CHAPTER 2

WILD

I didn't know the name of the man my dick was currently inside, but I didn't care either. He was trying to moan, but the cock shoved in his mouth from another stranger kept him quiet as I fucked him.

The sounds of pleasure and release echoed through the forest clearing, where dozens of bodies moved together in the final celebration before autumn claimed the land. Sweat glistened on tanned skin as the last rays of summer sunlight filtered through the canopy above. I gripped the stranger's hips tighter, feeling the familiar coil of heat and pleasure building in my core.

This was my third day at the annual end of summer orgy, lost in a haze of flesh and fae magic that made every nerve ending sing. The boundary between pleasure and power had dissolved completely. Each thrust, each touch, and each desperate cry fed the wild energy that coursed through all of us.

The man beneath me shuddered as I hit that perfect spot, his muffled sounds of ecstasy vibrating around the cock in his mouth. I could feel my climax approaching like a summer storm, inevitable and electric.

When I finally came, it was with a shout that seemed to shake the very trees around us. My fae magic sparked from my fingertips where they pressed into warm skin, and for a moment the air itself seemed to shimmer with possibility.

As the waves of pleasure subsided, I pulled back, breathing hard. The stranger rolled away with a satisfied smile, already reaching for someone else in the tangle of bodies. That was the beauty of these gatherings. There were no expectations, no complications, just pure hedonistic freedom. I loved every fucking moment of it.

I stumbled to my feet, legs unsteady, and made my way to the spring-fed pool on the other side of the trees, my cock swinging in the wind. The small pond was drenched in sunlight, a few other fae clinging to its edges. Lilies bloomed white and pink against the dark surface, bobbing as people walked in and out. A muscular male dryad, one I'd let fuck me at least three times, was coming out of the pool as I stepped in. My eyes went to his cock immediately. Dryads were always hung, and this one was a particularly beautiful shade of sage green.

"Wild," he said, giving me a nod. His eyes raked up and down my body. "Taking a break?"

I let out a long sigh. "Getting cleaned up, actually. I gotta go back to the academy today. Sad, right?"

The dryad's smile faltered slightly. "Widdershins Academy? You mean that stuffy witch school?" He ran a hand through his moss-like hair, droplets of water cascading down his chiseled chest. "What's a gorgeous creature like you doing there?"

I sank deeper into the cool water, letting it wash away three days' worth of various bodily fluids. "Family obligations. Keeping up appearances. The usual bullshit."

"Ah, Seelie Court politics." He nodded knowingly. "Your father still expecting you to follow in his diplomatic footsteps?"

I snorted, splashing water over my shoulders. "My father can expect whatever he wants. Doesn't mean I'm going to deliver."

The dryad laughed, a sound like wind through autumn leaves. "Well, if you need an escape during the semester, you know where to find me." He paused for a moment, looking me over again. "One for the road?"

My gaze dropped again, his cock twitching to attention and thickening right before my very eyes. I licked my lips hungrily, glancing back toward the oak tree where my bags were stored. School could wait, right?

"Come here," I said, wrapping my hands around his hips and pulling him close. "You better cum in my mouth this time, though," I teased, stroking his thick, beautiful cock. "You dryads have the sweetest cum in all the planes. It tastes like maple syrup."

The dryad's laugh turned into a low growl of pleasure as I took his long, girthy dick into my mouth, my tongue working along the ridged green shaft. His hands tangled in my ginger hair, gentle but insistent as I worked him deeper. The taste was exactly as I remembered, sweet and earthy, like fresh tree sap mixed with honey.

"Fuck, Wild," he gasped, his hips rocking slightly. "Your mouth is pure magic. If you don't want to join the court, I'll let you join mine as my personal courtesan."

"Thanks for the offer," I mumbled around his cock. "But you know I like to live by my own rules."

"I guess I better enjoy this then," he moaned back.

I hummed in agreement around him, the vibration making him shudder. Water lapped around my waist as I bobbed my head, taking him as deep as I could. His cock pulsed against my tongue, pre-cum covering my tastebuds.

"Fuck," the dryad groaned. "Nobody sucks cock like you, Wild. Damn."

The praise just made me redouble my efforts. I worked his shaft with one hand while my tongue flicked over his engorged head. The increased sensation made him stiffen even more, his cock rock hard in my mouth. I sucked harder, wanting that sweet dryad cum I loved so much. And as my friend moaned more, I realized he was close.

"I'm gonna—"

But that was all he managed to get out before he flooded my mouth with his seed. Clear, sticky fluid rushed over my tongue, sweetness bursting in my mouth. I groaned in pleasure as I drank him down, taking every last drop. It was just what I needed to round out a beautiful three-day orgy.

"Perfect," I murmured, pulling back with a satisfied grin and licking my lips clean. "Now I can face another year of stuffy witch academia."

The dryad chuckled, pressing a quick kiss to my lips. "Don't let them dull that wild spirit of yours."

"Thanks…" I paused. "I forgot you name."

"Laceleaf," the dryad smiled, kissing me again. "And don't you forget it. When you get back from school, I'm gonna ruin that ass of yours."

I gave him a wink. "Promise?"

"You have my word."

I climbed out of the pool with Laceleaf, water streaming from my pale skin. Giving him one last kiss, he headed back toward the main orgy, leaving me to make my way over to where I'd stashed my belongings. It was time to get dressed and get back to school.

Summer was officially over.

My bags sat exactly where I'd left them three days ago, untouched thanks to the protective wards I'd woven around them. I pulled on my clothes with reluctance, fitted jeans, a vintage band t-shirt I didn't recognize, and boots that had seen better days. I'd lifted them all from a thrift shop the last time I'd gone to the human world. Shoplifting, I realized, was kind of fun.

As I shouldered my pack, a familiar tingle ran down my spine. Someone was watching me. I turned to find Sage, an older fae with silver hair and knowing eyes, approaching through the trees. She was an advisor to my parents and my personal pain in the ass since she was the one usually in charge of me. She also had a tendency to be a bit of an oracle, making vague predictions at odd moments.

"Leaving us so soon, little prince?" she asked, her voice carrying that musical quality all ancient fae possessed.

"You know I have to," I replied, adjusting my bag's straps. "School waits for no one."

She tilted her head, studying me with an intensity that made my skin prickle. "This year will be different."

"They're all different," I said with a shrug. "New classes, new drama, same boring routine."

"No." Her voice carried the weight of prophecy. "This year, you'll find what you've been searching for."

I paused, meeting her ancient gaze. "And what exactly have I been searching for?"

A smile played at the corners of her lips. "Your place in this world. When the stars align, you'll find yourself as part of something larger. Three hearts, one storm, and a power that will change the world."

Before I could ask what the hell that fucking meant, she melted back into the forest like mist. Typical fae cryptic bullshit. Maybe my parents put her up to it just to entice me to go back to the academy. They knew how much I hated school. But I hated stupid prophecies even more.

I shook my head and took a deep breath. Concentrating hard, I forced my body to morph and change. My ears shrunk down to human size, retaining their points. I felt my face shift and tighten, my trickster grin shrinking along with my teeth as they both became more human-like as well. My body stayed mostly the same except for my fingers, which became a little shorter. By the time I let out my breath once more, I knew I looked almost passably human. It was to be my facade for the next few months in order to make the mortals comfortable. With a wave of my hand, I summoned up the portal that would take me back to their realm, to Widdershins Academy.

Stepping through, the familiar tug of interdimensional travel tugged at my consciousness. I couldn't stop from wondering what fresh hell awaited me at school. I wasn't allowed to choose my classes myself and my parents hadn't given me my schedule yet. That meant a trip to the dean's office to see what stupid bullshit I was supposed to be learning this year. I couldn't wait to graduate, so I could finally fuck off and do my own thing. My parents might've wanted me to join the Seelie Court like them, but I didn't want anything to do with that life. I craved… no *needed* freedom.

The portal deposited me at the perfectly formed ring of standing stones that served as the only magical entrance into the academy. The imposing Gothic towers of the main building stretched toward gray September clouds, and I could already smell the oppressive scent of old books and older rules wafting through the air. Students moved across the courtyard in small clusters, most of them looking disgustingly eager to be back.

I spotted a few familiar faces, other fae who looked as thrilled as I felt to be here, a coven of witch girls giggling over their class schedules, and some shifters lounging near the fountain like they owned the place. The usual hierarchy was already reasserting itself after the summer break.

"Wilderain of the Briar Hall," a crisp voice called from behind me.

I turned to find Professor Zante, the academy's vice-dean, approaching with her signature disapproving expression. Her silver hair was pulled back so severely it probably gave her a permanent headache, and her black robes billowed dramatically despite the complete lack of wind.

"Professor," I replied with a lazy grin. "Miss me over the summer?"

Her lips pursed. "The Dean wishes to see you immediately. Your... unique schedule requires explanation."

"Unique how?" I asked, though I was pretty sure I already knew. My parents had probably pulled strings to get me into the most boring, rule-heavy classes possible.

"You'll find out," she said, turning on her heel. "Follow me."

We walked through the familiar corridors, past portraits of long-dead magical scholars who seemed to frown disapprovingly at my casual attire. The scent of burnt sage and old parchment filled the air, along with the underlying hum of protective wards that made my fae magic itch beneath my skin.

The Dean's office hadn't changed. It was still stuffed with ancient artifacts and books that probably predated human civilization and not a lick of personality. Dean Eolens himself sat behind an enormous oak desk, his dark brown eyes lifting as I stepped inside.

"Ah, Wild," he said, not unkindly. "Sit."

I dropped into the chair across from him, slouching deliberately. The dean didn't seem like a bad guy, but he was authority, so I disliked him on principle. "So, what's this about a unique schedule?"

"Your parents have requested certain... alterations to your curriculum this year," Dean Eolens said, sliding a piece of parchment across his desk.

I snatched it up, scanning the list of classes with growing disbelief. "Advanced Magical Theory? Ethical Applications of Fae Glamour? Diplomatic Relations Between Realms?" I couldn't stop the disgust from creeping into my voice. "This is bullshit. These are all court preparation classes."

The Dean cleared his throat. "Your father was quite insistent—"

"Of course he was," I interrupted, tossing the schedule back onto the desk. "He wants me following in his boring-ass footsteps, playing nice with witches and vampires and whoever else the Seelie Court needs to schmooze."

"Mr. Briar Hall," Professor Zante said sharply from her position by the door. "Mind your language."

I rolled my eyes. "What if I refuse?"

Dean Eolens sighed, leaning back in his chair. The wood creaked beneath him as he steepled his fingers. "I'm afraid that's not an option. Your tuition has been paid with these specific conditions."

"So basically, I'm trapped," I muttered, running a hand through my still-damp hair. The maple-sweet taste of dryad cum lingered in my mouth, a reminder of the freedom I'd just left behind.

"However," the Dean continued, a hint of something unexpected in his voice, "there is one addition to your schedule that might interest you."

I raised an eyebrow. "What, Advanced Ass-Kissing 101?"

The Dean's lips twitched, almost like he wanted to smile. "Professor Blackwood has specifically requested you for a special independent study program. Only three students have been selected."

That got my attention. It was no secret that Professor Blackwood *hated* me, just like she hated anyone else that stood outside her perfect, little magic equations. She'd given my roommate, Caden Cromwell, a pretty nasty fucking time during the previous year. But now she was selecting *me* for a special program? Why the fuck would she do that?

"What's the catch?" I asked, leaning forward despite myself.

"The study focuses on pre-colonial magical practices," Dean Eolens explained. "Wild magic, to be precise. Magic that existed before the formal structures we teach today."

My pulse quickened. Wild magic was exactly the kind of chaotic, untamed power that called to my fae nature. It was also strictly forbidden in most academic settings. "And Blackwood is teaching this?"

"Supervising," the Dean corrected. "The students will be largely self-directed in their research and practice."

"Who are the other two?" I found myself asking, curiosity overriding my usual disdain for anything academic.

Professor Zante stepped forward, consulting a leather-bound ledger. "Elias Thorne and Caden Cromwell."

I nearly choked. "Caden's coming back? I thought his father's death meant—"

"Mr. Cromwell has apparently manifested new abilities since his father's passing," Dean Eolens said carefully. "Abilities that warrant further training."

Interesting. Caden had always been the shy, quiet type, practically powerless and invisible despite his powerful bloodline. He'd been my roommate for the past two years. I knew him better than anyone. But new manifestations after a parent's death?

That was interesting.

And Elias Thorne... I'd heard the name but knew nothing about him. Probably another stuck up witch like the rest of them.

"When do we start?" I heard myself asking.

"Tomorrow evening," the Dean replied, sliding another parchment across the desk. "You'll meet in Professor Blackwood's private study. Seven o'clock sharp."

CHAPTER 3

WILD

The moment I threw open the door to my room, I saw Caden standing there, his tongue halfway down Atlas's throat.

"Well," I muttered, just shaking my head as I stepped inside. "I see nothing's changed between you two."

"Wild!" Caden cried, tearing himself away and wiping his mouth quickly. "You're back!"

"I see you are too," I smiled, pulling him into a hug. "And as slutty as ever." I glanced up at Atlas over Caden's shoulder, holding my hand out to shake while Caden squeezed me. "You gotta watch out for those quiet ones, am I right?"

Atlas shook my hand, his grin wide. "Yep. I can't tell you how many times I got tied up with vines this summer."

I let out a gasp of surprise as I pulled Caden back by the shoulders, looking him in the eyes. "And you're kinky now, too? Who the hell are you and what have you done with my old roommate?"

Caden's face flushed a deep crimson, spreading down his neck and disappearing beneath his collar. "It's not… I mean… we weren't—"

"Oh, you absolutely were," I laughed, throwing my bag onto my bed. "And good for you, honestly. About time you learned to have some fun."

Atlas wrapped an arm around Caden's waist, pulling him back against his chest with obvious possessiveness. "He's been full of surprises this summer."

"I bet," I said, studying them both with new interest. There was something different about Caden beyond just newfound confidence and his mate bond with Atlas. His magic felt... stronger somehow. Wilder. "So, are you going to tell me about these new abilities everyone's whispering about, or do I have to guess?"

Caden shifted uncomfortably, his fingers unconsciously twisting together. "It's complicated."

"Everything interesting is complicated," I pointed out, settling cross-legged on my bed. "Come on, we're roommates. Spill."

Atlas and Caden exchanged a look, some silent communication passing between them. Finally, Caden sighed and held out his hand, palm up. With barely a whisper of intention, a small vine sprouted from his skin, unfurling delicate leaves as it grew.

"Holy shit," I breathed, leaning forward. "That's not minor nature magic anymore."

"No," Caden said quietly, letting the vine wither away. "It started when Atlas and I finished the mate bond. But when he…" Caden paused, lowering his voice. "When Atlas became my familiar, everything just sort of exploded."

"Caden Cromwell," I muttered, grinning mischievously. "You know familiar bonds like that are forbidden here!" I paused, giving him a wink. "I'm proud of you."

His face turned bright red in embarrassment. "Well, it's not just that either. It turns out I'm not a full-blooded Cromwell either."

"What?!"

"Yep," he nodded. "Apparently I'm half dryad."

"After all the pureblood bullshit your father put you through, he went out and knocked up a dryad?"

"I guess so."

"Damn," I sighed, flopping onto my bed. "But I guess that explains why Blackwood wants you in her independent study. She wants to see what a half-breed is capable of, even if she openly despises them."

"I think you find Professor Blackwood has turned over a new leaf," Atlas interjected. "She's not quite as prejudiced as she used to be."

"Huh. I guess that's why she asked me to be in her little study group, too. She specifically requested me for the wild magic program," I continued, stretching out on my bed. "Which is weird as hell considering she usually acts like I'm some kind of disease she might catch."

Caden perked up with interest. "You're in the independent study too?!"

"Yep. You, me, and some Thorne kid I've never met." I rolled onto my side, propping my head up on my elbow. "Speaking

of which, what do you know about Elias Thorne?"

"Not much," Caden admitted, settling onto his own bed with Atlas beside him. "He's... well, he's kind of the golden boy. Perfect grades, perfect family, perfect everything. Keeps to himself mostly. I never talked to him. I was too powerless to be on his radar."

"Sounds boring," I said with a yawn. "Probably another stick-up-the-ass witch who thinks everyone else is beneath him."

Atlas frowned. "Actually, I've heard some concerning things about the Thorne family lately. My pack's been tracking some anti-monster movements gaining traction, and the Thorne name keeps coming up in intelligence reports."

That caught my attention. I sat up straighter. "What kind of movements?"

"The kind that think magical creatures should stay in their own realms," Atlas said grimly. "There's been talk of reinstating the old separation laws, making it illegal for fae and other non-human supernaturals to attend schools like Widdershins."

Caden's face paled. "But that would mean—"

"Exactly," Atlas nodded. "No more integrated education. No more mixed communities. Back to the old days when everyone stuck to their own kind."

I felt a familiar anger stirring in my chest. "Let me guess, they're using my charming roommate's dear departed daddy as their poster boy for why witches shouldn't associate with 'lesser' magical beings."

Caden winced. "Apparently, some of his old followers have been circulating his writings again. The parts about magical purity and maintaining bloodline integrity."

"Fucking fantastic," I muttered, running a hand through my hair. "So now I get to deal with stuck-up witches AND potential hate groups. This year just keeps getting better. I should've stayed at the orgy."

Atlas raised an eyebrow. "Orgy?"

"Three-day end of summer celebration in the fae realm," I explained with a grin. "Way more fun than anything this place has to offer."

"Wild," Caden said, his voice taking on a worried tone, "maybe you should be careful about mentioning stuff like that. If these anti-monster groups are really gaining power..."

"Fuck them," I said, flopping back down on my bed. "I'm not going to hide who I am because some bigoted assholes can't handle a little chaos in their perfectly ordered world. Besides, witches have orgies all the time, they're just invite only."

Atlas's expression darkened. "It's not just about you, though. If they succeed in getting these laws passed, it affects all of us. Caden would be forced to choose between his witch heritage and his dryad side. I wouldn't be allowed on campus at all as a shifter."

The weight of that settled over the room like a heavy blanket. I'd been so focused on my own irritation that I hadn't really considered the broader implications. The thought of losing Caden as a roommate, of this place becoming even more sterile and segregated than it already was, made my stomach twist.

"Well then," I said, sitting up again with renewed determination, "I guess we'll just have to make sure that doesn't happen."

"How exactly do you propose we do that?" Caden asked.

I grinned, feeling that familiar spark of mischief and rebellion ignite in my chest. "By being so fucking brilliant in this independent study that even the most prejudiced witch can't deny our worth. By proving that wild magic, mixed heritage, and a little chaos make everything better, not worse."

Caden looked uncertain, but Atlas nodded slowly. "It's not a bad strategy. Show them what they'd be losing."

"Exactly," I said, jumping up from my bed. "Besides, I'm curious about this Elias Thorne kid now. If his family's really involved in these movements, it'll be interesting to see where he stands."

"Just... be careful, Wild," Caden said softly. "Not everyone can be won over with charm and rebellion."

I winked at him. "Good thing I've got other talents then."

Atlas snorted. "Your 'other talents' are exactly what's going to get you in trouble with these purist types."

"My other talents are what make life worth living," I shot back, but even as I said it, I could feel the truth in his words settling uncomfortably in my chest. The freedom I'd always taken for granted suddenly felt more precious, more fragile.

Caden stood up abruptly, pacing to the window. "There's something else," he said quietly, his back to us. "Something I haven't told you yet."

Atlas and I exchanged glances. "What is it?" Atlas asked, moving to stand behind Caden.

"My father… he didn't just die in some fight between him and Rowan Hargrove." Caden glanced at me before turning his head away in shame. "I… I killed him myself."

The room went dead silent. Even the ambient magical energy that usually hummed through the dormitory walls seemed to pause, as if the very academy was holding its breath.

"What?" I whispered, my voice barely audible.

Atlas's hands moved to Caden's shoulders, steadying him as his body began to tremble. "Caden…"

"He was going to kill Atlas," Caden said, his voice hollow. "He'd put a blood curse on me and was torturing me… and then he found out about our bond and my newfound power. He… He wanted me to lock Atlas up and use him as a magical

battery… or put him in the ground. And when he tried to kill us, I just… *snapped*."

Caden turned back, crawling into Atlas's lap and allowing himself to be wrapped up in those strong werewolf arms.

"He was destroyed," Atlas said, finishing the story. "And transformed into a tree. Rowan Hargrove was taken to the Elder Council and sentenced to prison for several years for attacking the students on campus."

I nodded, the memory still fresh in my mind. It was Rowan Hargrove that forced me to transform into my true fae form with a spell, and then locked me in a magical paralysis that would've eventually killed me. I'd been trying to forget it, but the memories still haunted my dreams now and then. It was the most terrified I'd ever been. And while I knew Caden was the reason I'd been saved, I never knew he had to kill his own father to do it. That part he'd kept a secret.

"Caden, I had no idea," I said, my usual flippancy evaporating. I moved to sit beside them on the bed, placing a hand on his knee. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I couldn't," he whispered, his blue eyes watery. "I was afraid of what people would think. What you would think."

"What I would think?" I squeezed his knee. "You saved my life. You saved Atlas. Your father was a monster who tortured you your entire life and then tried to kill the people you care about. I think you're fucking brave."

Atlas pressed a kiss to Caden's temple. "That's what I keep telling him."

"And now his followers are using his death to fuel their hatred," Caden said bitterly. "They're saying his death was caused by magical creatures. That the Elder Council protected the shifters that killed him off and covered it all up."

"They don't know the truth," I pointed out.

"And they can't," Atlas added firmly. "The Elder Council sealed the records. If people found out Caden killed his father, even in self-defense..."

"They'd use it against him," I finished, understanding dawning. "Against all of us." I paused for a moment, thinking it over. "But… they won't even unseal it to protect themselves? It sounds like the Elder Council is getting caught in the crossfire."

"We tried," Atlas sighed. "Even my father reached out to them. They won't budge."

Caden nodded miserably. "So now I have to sit there and listen to them talk about my father like he was some kind of martyr for magical purity, when really he was just a sadistic bastard who spent years torturing his own son for something he couldn't control."

I flopped back on the bed, staring at the ceiling. "This is seriously fucked up."

"Welcome to junior year," Atlas said dryly.

"So, what are we supposed to do?" I asked, propping myself up on my elbows. "Just let these assholes spew their hate unchallenged?"

"For now, let's just focus on the independent study," Caden said, his voice losing its desperate edge. "We learn everything we can about wild magic. We get stronger. And maybe, if we're really lucky, this whole thing will blow over and we can just be students again."

"Right, because anti-monster movements have such a great track record of just *blowing over*," I muttered, but I kept my voice light. No need to push Caden when he was already dealing with so much.

Atlas shot me a warning look over Caden's head. "Wild's right that we can't ignore it, but we also need to be strategic. My father says these groups are still small, but they're vocal. And they're finding sympathetic ears in high places."

"Like the Thorne family, apparently," I said, connecting the dots. "And now we're supposed to work with their golden boy on wild magic. That's... convenient."

Caden frowned. "You think Elias was sent to spy on us?"

"I think it's weird that Blackwood would put us together," I replied, standing up and pacing the small room. "A half-dryad witch whose father's death is fueling anti-monster sentiment, a fae from the Seelie Court known for breaking every rule in the book, and the perfect pureblood witch from a family that might be backing hate groups? That's not a coincidence."

"Maybe Professor Blackwood has her own agenda," Atlas suggested. "She's been different since what happened with Rowan Hargrove last year. Less rigid."

I stopped pacing, a thought occurring to me. "Or maybe she's trying to force a confrontation. Get everything out in the open."

"I don't think that's what's going on," Caden said softly. He looked up at me, his eyes pleading. "Can we talk about something else?" he asked. "I… I just want to be a normal student again."

I let out a long sigh and allowed the smirk to curl back onto my face. "Fine," I said, stepping over and flopping down on the bed next to him. "So… how big is this werewolf's cock?"

CHAPTER 4

ELIAS

I sat ramrod straight in the uncomfortable wooden chair across from Professor Blackwood. In the back of my mind, I heard my mother nagging me to keep my shoulders back and my chin high, sitting proud and tall to honor the Thorne family name. Even now, when she wasn't sitting a few feet away, I still heard her voice. And after years of acquiescing to her demands, my body was too used to being stiff to even consider slouching.

The professor's study looked exactly as I'd expected. It was full of meticulously organized bookshelves, ancient tomes arranged by subject matter, and not a speck of dust to be found. Her desk was polished mahogany, the surface clear except for a leather-bound notebook and a silver athame that caught the late afternoon light streaming through the stained-glass windows.

"Mr. Thorne," Professor Blackwood said, her voice crisp as autumn leaves. "Thank you for your punctuality."

"Of course, Professor," I replied automatically, my voice carefully modulated to that perfect tone my parents had drilled into me, respectful without being obsequious.

She regarded me over the rim of her spectacles, her piercing gaze making me feel as though she could see straight through to my grandmother's journal hidden in my bag. I resisted the urge to shift uncomfortably.

"I assume your parents have informed you about the nature of this independent study?"

"Yes, Professor. Wild magic. Pre-colonial practices."

She nodded, making a small note in her book. "And what are your thoughts on exploring magical techniques outside the structured methodologies you've been raised with?"

It was a trap. It had to be. I chose my words carefully.

"I believe that understanding the foundations of our craft can only strengthen our modern applications," I said, the rehearsed answer flowing easily.

Something like disappointment flickered across her face. "A diplomatic answer, Mr. Thorne. But I'm not interested in diplomacy for this project. I'm interested in truth."

Before I could formulate a response, the door to the study burst open.

"Sorry I'm late, Professor. Got caught up in... well, something that's definitely not against school rules."

I turned to see a tall young man with wild ginger hair sauntering into the room. He wore ripped jeans, a faded t-shirt with some obscure band logo, and an expression of practiced nonchalance that immediately made my spine stiffen further. Everything about him screamed rebellion.

"Mr. Briar Hall," Professor Blackwood said, her tone resigned rather than angry. "Your timing is, as always, impeccable."

"I try," he replied with a grin, dropping into the chair next to mine. He sprawled in it like he owned the place, all loose limbs and casual confidence. "Is this Thorne?"

His eyes, a startling shade of green with flecks of gold, swept over me with undisguised curiosity. I felt myself being assessed and somehow found wanting in the span of seconds.

"Elias Thorne," I said, extending my hand formally as I'd been taught. "Pleased to meet you."

He looked at my hand with amusement before taking it. His skin was warm, almost unnaturally so, and I felt a strange tingle where our palms connected. "Wild. Just Wild."

I recognized him immediately as fae. The slightly pointed ears, the mischievous grin, and that unmistakable aura of chaotic energy that seemed to vibrate the air around him. This was Wilderain of the Briar Hall, son of a high-ranking Seelie Court family. I'd heard whispers about him, most of them scandalized.

I withdrew my hand quickly, feeling an unexpected heat coil in my stomach. He was surprisingly beautiful. "You're fae," I said, then immediately regretted stating the obvious.

"And you're observant," Wild replied with a smirk, leaning further back in his chair and propping one boot on his knee. "What gave it away? The ears? The irresistible charm? The fact that I make this stuffy room about ten times more interesting just by existing in it?"

Professor Blackwood cleared her throat. “If you two are quite finished with introductions, we’re still waiting on our third participant.”

As if summoned by her words, the door opened again, this time more hesitantly. A slender young man with light brown hair and startlingly blue eyes edged into the room, followed closely by a taller, broader student who radiated protective energy.

“Mr. Cromwell,” Professor Blackwood acknowledged with a nod. “And Mr. Faolan, who I don’t recall inviting to this session.”

“Sorry, Professor,” the blue-eyed student, who must’ve been Caden Cromwell, said softly. “Atlas was just walking me here. He’s leaving now.” He turned to the larger student and whispered something I couldn’t hear.

The one called Atlas squeezed Caden’s shoulder once before backing out of the room, his eyes never leaving Caden until the door closed between them.

“Caden!” Wild exclaimed, his face lighting up. “Look at you, showing up almost on time. I’m so proud.”

Caden gave Wild a small smile as he took the third seat. “I live to exceed your expectations.”

I watched this exchange with interest. They clearly knew each other well, which made me the outsider in this trio. The familiar feeling of being isolated despite being in a room with others settled over me like a second skin. It was just like being at home or at one of my parent’s lavish parties. Everyone knew who I was by name, but not me personally.

“Now that we’re all here,” Professor Blackwood said, rising from her seat, “we can begin.” She moved to a large cabinet behind her desk and withdrew a worn leather case. “This independent study will challenge everything you think you know about magic. It will require you to abandon structure, embrace chaos, and perhaps most importantly, work together.”

Wild snorted. “Chaos is my middle name. Actually, it’s technically ‘*of the*,’ but that’s beside the point.”

I remained silent, watching as Professor Blackwood opened the case to reveal three identical crystal pendants, each suspended on a silver chain.

“These are Resonance Stones,” she explained, lifting one carefully. “Ancient artifacts that respond to raw magical energy. Unlike modern focusing tools which channel and control magic, these amplify it in its purest form.”

She handed one to each of us. The moment the chain dropped into my palm, I felt a jolt of energy that made my teeth ache. The crystal was warm, almost hot, and it seemed to pulse in rhythm with my heartbeat.

Wild whistled low. “These things are illegal in most realms, aren’t they?”

“They’re restricted,” Professor Blackwood corrected. “For good reason. Wild magic amplified through these stones can be unpredictable, dangerous, and...” She paused, her eyes glinting. “Extraordinarily powerful.”

Caden held his pendant gingerly, as if it might explode. “What exactly are we supposed to do with them?”

“Learn,” the professor said simply. “These stones will help you access magical practices that predate modern witchcraft by centuries. Magic that doesn’t follow rules or formulas. Magic that responds to emotion, instinct, and raw will.”

I stared down at the crystal in my palm, feeling it grow warmer by the second. Everything in my upbringing screamed that this was wrong, dangerous, improper. But underneath that voice was another one, quieter but growing stronger, the same voice that had been awakened by my grandmother’s journal.

“Your first exercise,” Professor Blackwood continued, “is to establish a magical connection with your partners. Not a formal bond, but a resonance that will allow you to work together effectively.”

“How do we do that?” I asked, my voice coming out smaller than I’d intended.

Wild grinned, already fastening his chain around his neck. “Easy. We just—”

The moment the crystal touched his skin, the room exploded with light. Not the clean, controlled illumination of proper spell work, but something wild and chaotic that seemed to dance with a life of its own. The air crackled with energy, and I felt my own pendant grow scorching hot in response.

“Wild!” Caden gasped, his pendant beginning to glow as well.

I looked down at my own stone just as it burst into brilliant white light. The three crystals seemed to be calling to each other, their energies reaching across the space between us like invisible threads.

And then something went horribly wrong.

The threads of energy snapped taut, and suddenly I was drowning in a sensation that wasn’t my own. Wild’s reckless joy crashed into me like a tidal wave, followed immediately by Caden’s gentle warmth and nervous energy. But more than that, I could feel their magic, raw and unfiltered, pouring into me as mine poured into them.

The room spun around me as foreign emotions and sensations overwhelmed my carefully constructed mental barriers. Wild’s memories of summer freedom, the taste of sweet dryad’s cum still lingering on his tongue, the feeling of grass beneath naked skin. Caden’s recent awakening to power, the intoxicating rush of discovering he was more than he’d ever believed possible, the solid comfort of Atlas’s arms around him.

And underneath it all, something deeper. A connection, raw and primal, that had no place in the structured magic I’d been taught. The three of us were being bound together by these ancient stones in ways I couldn’t comprehend or control.

“Stop!” I gasped, trying to yank the pendant from my neck, but my fingers wouldn’t obey. The crystal seemed fused to my skin, burning white-hot against my chest.

Wild was on his knees now, his face contorted in a mixture of pain and ecstasy. “Holy fuck,” he breathed, his eyes glowing with an unearthly light. “This is—”

“Too much,” Caden finished, his voice strained as he clutched the edge of his chair. His pendant pulsed with a rhythm that matched my racing heartbeat.

Professor Blackwood moved quickly, her hands weaving complex patterns in the air. “This shouldn’t be happening,” she muttered, her usual composure slipping. “The resonance shouldn’t be this strong.”

But her magic seemed to bounce harmlessly off the energy field that now surrounded us. The threads connecting our pendants had become visible, glowing cords of raw power that twisted and knotted together in the center of our triangle.

I could feel my carefully constructed mental walls crumbling as Wild’s chaos poured into me. His memories of bodies tangled in forest clearings, of magic used for pleasure rather than purpose, of freedom I’d never known. Alongside it came Caden’s newfound power, vine-like and growing, stretching toward sunlight after years in shadow.

And to my horror, I felt my own rigid upbringing, my secrets, my hidden longings all spilling out to them in return.

“Make it stop,” I pleaded, no longer caring how I sounded. This wasn’t the controlled, dignified magic of the Thorne family. This was something ancient and terrifying.

Wild’s eyes locked with mine across the maelstrom of energy as he stepped closer. “Don’t fight it,” he called, his voice somehow inside my head rather than carried by air and his hands outstretched. “Surrender to it.”

“I can’t,” I gasped, feeling my magic straining against the bonds of my training, wanting to break free and join with theirs.

Wild rushed forward, grabbing me by the hand. “Let go!”

The moment we connected, the knot of energy between us pulsed once, twice, and then exploded outward. Books flew from shelves, windows rattled in their frames, and the very foundations of the building seemed to shake. Professor Blackwood was thrown backward against her desk, her protective wards shattering like glass. Caden was thrown backward as well, crashing against the far wall with a thud.

And then, as suddenly as it had begun, it stopped.

I found myself on the floor, my limbs tangled with Wild’s, both of us panting as if we’d run for miles. The pendants had gone dark, but I could still *feel him* in my mind, his distinct fae presence that hadn’t been there before.

“What... the actual... fuck,” Wild managed between breaths, his face inches from mine. I could count each of his freckles, could smell the lingering sweetness of summer magic on his skin. It was intoxicating…

“Mr. Thorne! Mr. Briar Hall!” Professor Blackwood’s sharp voice cut through the haze. “Separate immediately!”

I tried to push myself up, but my limbs felt like they belonged to someone else. Wild’s magic was still coursing through me, making my carefully ordered thoughts scatter like leaves in a storm. When I finally managed to sit up, the room spun violently.

“Caden,” Wild croaked, rolling away from me and toward where our third partner lay crumpled against the wall. “Is he—”

Caden stirred, pressing a hand to his forehead. When he pulled it away, there was blood on his fingers. “I’m okay,” he said weakly. “I think.”

Professor Blackwood rushed to him, her hands glowing with healing magic. “This should not have happened,” she muttered, examining the cut on his forehead. “The stones were meant to create a gentle resonance, not a full magical binding.”

“A binding?” I struggled to my feet, one hand pressed against my chest where the pendant still hung, now cold against my skin. “What kind of binding?”

Wild was already upright, moving with that fluid grace that seemed natural to the fae. He looked remarkably composed for someone who’d just been writhing on the floor in magical overload. “The fun kind, apparently,” he said with a grin that didn’t quite hide the concern in his eyes.

“This is not amusing, Mr. Briar Hall,” Professor Blackwood snapped. “You three have just created an unprecedented magical connection. I can feel it from here… you’re linked in ways that will take considerable study to understand.”

I could feel it too, like background music I couldn’t quite turn off. Wild’s presence hummed at the edge of my consciousness, chaotic and warm. I could still sense Caden’s power, of course, but his thoughts and energy weren’t in my head. Not like Wild’s.

“Linked how?” Caden asked, accepting Professor Blackwood’s help to stand. The cut on his forehead had already healed, leaving only a faint pink line.

“I’m not entirely certain,” she admitted, returning to her desk and making rapid notes. “The literature on wild magic bindings is... sparse. Most of the original materials have been destroyed.”

Wild’s expression darkened. “Of course they were. Can’t have people learning magic that actually feels good, can we?”

I wanted to argue with him, to defend the structured traditions I’d been raised with, but the words wouldn’t come. Not when I could still feel the echo of what we’d just experienced. This new magic was almost overwhelming with possibility.

“The immediate concern,” Professor Blackwood continued, “is that you three are now magically entangled. Your spells may affect each other unpredictably. Your emotions could bleed through the connection. And until we know how to fix it, none of you are to use magic. Is that understood?”

CHAPTER 5

ELIAS

"No magic at all?" Wild's voice rose in disbelief. "That's like asking me not to breathe!"

I felt his indignation surge through our newfound connection, hot and electric, making my own chest tighten in response. The sensation was so alien. Feeling someone else's emotions as if they were my own… I had to grip the edge of a nearby bookshelf just to remain standing.

"Professor," I said, struggling to maintain my composure, "there must be some alternative. The Thorne family has extensive resources. Perhaps my father's library—"

"Your father's library contains only approved magical texts, Mr. Thorne," Professor Blackwood cut me off. "What we're dealing with predates such careful curation."

Wild snorted. "Translation? Your daddy's books won't help because they've been sanitized of anything actually interesting."

I bristled, both at his words and the wave of dismissive amusement that accompanied them through our link. "You don't know anything about my family."

"I know enough," Wild replied, green eyes flashing. "And now, thanks to whatever this is—" he gestured between us, "—I'm getting a front-row seat to the Thorne family's greatest hits. Gotta say, not a fan of the soundtrack so far. Y'all are boring as fuck."

Heat crept up my neck. Could he really see my memories? The thought was horrifying.

"Both of you, enough," Caden interjected, his voice quiet but firm. "This isn't helping."

Professor Blackwood nodded approvingly. "Mr. Cromwell is correct. Antagonizing each other will only strengthen the connection through emotional resonance."

Wild rolled his eyes but fell silent, though I could feel his frustration simmering beneath the surface. It was disorienting, like having a second heartbeat alongside my own.

"Now," Professor Blackwood continued, "I need to consult some... alternative sources regarding this binding. In the meantime, you three will remain together."

"Together?" I echoed, a note of panic creeping into my voice. "For how long?"

"Until we determine the nature and extent of this connection." She began gathering items from her desk. "Physical proximity may help stabilize the bond and prevent further... incidents."

Wild groaned dramatically. "So, I'm stuck babysitting Mr. Perfect here? No thanks."

"Wild and I are already roommates," Caden added.

Professor Blackwood turned to me. "Then you will stay in Mr. Cromwell and Mr. Briar Hall's dormitory," she declared. "I'll have a third bed brought in immediately. And Mr. Thorne, I'll inform your residence director of the change."

My carefully ordered world was crumbling around me. Staying in a dormitory? With these two? My parents would be furious when they found out.

"Professor," I began, desperately searching for an excuse, "my personal study materials—"

"Will be transferred," she said firmly. "This is not a request, Mr. Thorne. Given the unpredictable nature of this binding, separation could be dangerous for all three of you."

Wild was suddenly beside me, close enough that I could feel the heat radiating from his skin. "Dangerous how?" he asked, and I felt his curiosity spike through our connection.

"Wild magic bindings have been known to cause physical deterioration if the bonded parties are kept apart for extended periods," Professor Blackwood explained, her voice taking on a lecturing tone. "Fever, disorientation, magical instability. In extreme cases, complete magical burnout."

The blood drained from my face. "Burnout?"

"The permanent loss of magical ability," she confirmed grimly. "Which is why you will remain together until I can find a

solution."

Caden moved closer to us, creating a small triangle. "How long do we have before... the deterioration starts?"

"Unknown. The literature suggests anywhere from hours to days, depending on the strength of the initial binding." Professor Blackwood's gaze swept over us. "Given the intensity of what just occurred, I wouldn't recommend testing it."

Wild's hand suddenly shot out, grabbing my wrist. The contact sent a jolt of energy up my arm, and I saw his eyes widen as he felt it too.

"Shit," he breathed. "I can feel your magic under your skin. It's like... lightning trapped in glass."

I tried to pull away, but his grip tightened. "Let go of me."

"Can't," he said, his voice strained. "Something's happening."

The pendant around my neck began to warm again, and I heard Caden gasp as his did the same. The three crystals were responding to each other once more, pulsing in sync.

"Professor," Caden said urgently, "they're activating again."

Professor Blackwood moved quickly, her hands weaving containment spells around us. "Whatever you do, don't let go of each other. If the binding destabilizes while you're in physical contact—"

She didn't finish the sentence, but she didn't need to. I could feel Wild's panic bleeding into me, mixing with my own terror to create something almost overwhelming. My free hand reached out instinctively, finding Caden's fingers.

The moment we connected, the chaotic energy settled into something almost... peaceful. The pendants' glow softened, and the crushing weight of foreign emotions eased into something manageable.

"Interesting," Professor Blackwood murmured, making notes. "Physical contact appears to stabilize the connection."

Wild's thumb was tracing patterns on my wrist, and I realized with horror that it felt... good. Comforting, even. "So, we're basically magically handcuffed to each other?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes."

I closed my eyes, trying to process this nightmare. My parents were going to kill me. I could already hear my mother's scandalized voice, her lecture about proper associations and the Thorne family name.

"Let them try," Wild muttered, and I realized with a start that he was responding to my thoughts.

"You can hear me?" I whispered, horrified.

"Not exactly," he replied, his green eyes searching mine. "More like... I can feel what you're feeling. The fear of disappointing Mommy and Daddy is coming through loud and clear."

Professor Blackwood cleared her throat. "This development is concerning. Your binding appears to be strengthening rather than stabilizing."

Caden squeezed my hand gently. "We'll figure this out, Elias."

His calm certainty washed over me, a welcome counterpoint to Wild's chaotic energy. I found myself nodding, drawing strength from both of them despite myself.

"For now," Professor Blackwood continued, "you three should proceed to your dormitory. I'll have Mr. Thorne's belongings sent over immediately. And remember, no magic. Not even the simplest spell."

Wild finally released my wrist, though I could still feel the imprint of his fingers on my skin. "Come on, roomies," he said with forced cheerfulness. "Let's go have a big fuckin' slumber party."

The walk across campus was excruciating. Every student we passed seemed to stare, whispering behind their hands as they watched the unlikely trio we made. The perfect Thorne heir, the notorious fae troublemaker, and the quiet Cromwell boy were walking so close our shoulders kept brushing. Nobody had ever seen anything like it.

"They're talking about us," I muttered, keeping my eyes fixed ahead.

"They're always talking about me," Wild replied with a shrug. "Might as well give them something worth gossiping about." Before I could react, he slung his arm around my shoulders, pulling me against his side.

The contact sent a surge of magic rushing through me, so powerful I nearly stumbled. Wild's emotions flooded my senses. Amusement, defiance, and something deeper, a loneliness he kept carefully hidden beneath his carefree exterior.

"What are you doing?" I hissed, trying to pull away despite the pleasant warmth spreading through my chest.

"Experimenting," he whispered back, his lips too close to my ear. "Every time we touch, the connection changes. Don't you feel it?"

I did feel it. The chaos of his magic was blending with mine, creating something new and strangely beautiful. It terrified me how right it felt.

"Wild," Caden warned quietly, "maybe not in the middle of the quad?"

But Wild only grinned wider. "What's the matter, Cromwell? Jealous? There's room for you too." He reached out with his free arm, pulling Caden against his other side.

The moment we were all connected, the pendants around our necks began to glow softly beneath our clothing. I felt the shift immediately, a harmonizing of three distinct magical signatures that had no right to work together so well. For a moment, the world around us seemed to shimmer, the mundane reality of Widdershins overlaid with something older and wilder.

“Goddess,” I breathed, unable to stop myself from leaning into Wild’s embrace. The sensation was intoxicating.

“See?” Wild murmured, his voice taking on a husky quality that sent shivers down my spine. “It feels good when you stop fighting it.”

Students were openly staring now. I caught sight of Erinne Willow, daughter of a member of the Elder Council, watching us with undisguised shock. Next to her, several junior witches from prominent families whispered furiously behind their hands.

“Elias Thorne with his arms around a fae and a half-breed?”

“Is he under some kind of enchantment?”

“Wait until his parents hear about this...”

I should have cared more. Should have pulled away and salvaged what dignity I could. But the magic flowing between us made everything else seem distant and unimportant.

“Fuck them,” Wild said cheerfully, loud enough for everyone to hear. “They’re just jealous they can’t feel what we’re feeling right now.”

Caden made a strangled noise. “Wild, please—”

But it was too late. Wild suddenly spun me around to face him, his green eyes glittering with mischief and something darker, more primal. “Let’s really give them something to talk about.”

Before I could react, he cupped my face in his hands and pressed his lips to mine.

The world exploded into light and sensation. His kiss tasted like summer berries and wild magic, intoxicating and forbidden. Our pendants flared brilliantly, visible even through our clothing, casting strange shadows across the quad. I should have pushed him away, should have been horrified, but instead, my hands gripped his shirt, pulling him closer as my magic surged to meet his.

When he finally pulled back, I was breathing hard, my carefully ordered mind in complete disarray. Wild’s eyes were glowing with fae light, and his smile was triumphant.

“Holy shit,” he whispered. “That was even better than I expected.”

“Oh my god…” Erinne snickered loudly. “Look at their pants!”

Reality came crashing back as I became aware of the dozens of students laughing, watching us with expressions ranging from shock to disgust to fascination. It wasn’t until I looked down that I realized why.

Wild, Caden, and I were all rock hard.

My face burned with mortification as I tried desperately to adjust my pants to hide my obvious arousal. This was a nightmare beyond anything I could have imagined. The heir to the Thorne family, standing in the middle of campus with an erection visible to half the student body.

“Well,” Wild said, completely unbothered by our predicament, “that’s new. Usually takes a lot more than kissing to get a group hard-on going.”

“Shut up,” I hissed, grabbing both him and Caden by the arms. “We need to get out of here. Now.”

Caden’s face was as red as mine, but he nodded quickly. “The dorm. Fast.”

We practically ran across the remaining distance to the residential buildings, the sound of laughter and shocked whispers following us. I could already imagine the rumors spreading like wildfire through the academy. By dinner, every student would know that Elias Thorne had been caught making out with a fae in public and that he’d popped a boner because of it.

Fuck.

The moment we reached Wild and Caden’s room, I slammed the door behind us and leaned against it, breathing hard. My arousal had finally started to subside, but the phantom sensation of Wild’s lips on mine lingered.

“That,” Wild announced, throwing himself onto his bed with obvious satisfaction, “was fucking amazing.”

“Amazing?” I turned on him, my carefully controlled composure finally cracking. “Do you have any idea what you’ve just done? My reputation, my family’s name—”

“Will survive your first public display of actual human emotion,” Wild interrupted. “Trust me, the world won’t end because perfect little Elias Thorne got caught with his dick hard.”

Caden sat heavily on his own bed, still looking stunned. “The physical response though... that has to be connected to the binding, right? I mean, I’ve never...” He trailed off, glancing between Wild and me.

“Never what?” Wild asked with interest.

“Thought about anyone other than Atlas,” Caden finished quietly.

I felt my stomach drop. “You mean this binding is making us feel things that aren’t real?”

Wild’s expression shifted, something like hurt flickering across his features before he masked it with his usual smirk. “Worried you might actually like kissing boys, Princess?”

“That’s not—” I started, then stopped, unsure what I was trying to say. The truth was, I had enjoyed it. More than enjoyed it. And that terrified me more than any magical binding.

“How am I going to explain this to Atlas?” Caden interrupted before I could gather my thoughts. I could feel the desperate panic welling up inside him through our bond. “I don’t want him to think I’m cheating on him!”

“He’s not gonna think that,” Wild replied, his tone shifting completely as he walked over and pulled Caden into a hug. “We’ll tell him what happened and then we’ll figure it out.” He glanced up at me. “But I don’t know how I’m gonna live with this tight-ass,” he muttered, gesturing at me. “You are gonna have to loosen up dude because your vibe is seriously harshing my mellow.”

“I…” I began, massaging my temples as a migraine started to come on. “I don’t even know what that fucking means.”

CHAPTER 6

WILD

"Will you *please* stop thinking so fucking loud?" I barked across the room to the corner where Elias had barricaded himself in by his belongings. "Stop worrying so much. Fuck."

Elias's head snapped up from where he'd been hunched over what looked like a leather-bound journal, his brown eyes flashing with irritation. "I can't help how I think!"

"Well, learn," I shot back, flopping dramatically onto my bed. "Your anxiety is giving me a headache."

"My anxiety?" His voice pitched higher. "You're the one broadcasting every crude thought that pops into your head!"

Caden sighed from his position on his own bed, where he'd been trying to mediate between us for the past hour. "Maybe we should try Professor Blackwood's breathing exercises again—"

"Fuck the breathing exercises," I interrupted. "They don't work when Mr. Perfect over there is having a mental breakdown every five minutes about what Mommy and Daddy will think."

Elias slammed his journal shut, the sound sharp in the small room. "At least I care about something other than my next orgasm!"

"Hey, orgasms are important," I replied with a grin, enjoying the way his face flushed. "They're honest. Unlike whatever bullshit facade you're trying to put up right now."

"That's enough," Caden said firmly, standing up. "This isn't helping anyone."

But I was on a roll now, fed up with three days of Elias's constant mental chatter filtering through our bond. His fears, his rigid self-control, his desperate need for approval. It was all there, buzzing in the back of my mind like an angry wasp I couldn't swat.

"You want to know what I think?" I continued, ignoring Caden's warning look. "I think you're terrified that you actually liked kissing me. I think you're scared shitless that maybe perfect little Elias isn't as straight as his parents think he is."

Elias went very still, his knuckles white where they gripped the journal. "You don't know anything about me."

"I know more than you think," I said, sitting up. "I can feel it, remember? All that repressed desire, all those thoughts you won't let yourself have. You're wound tighter than a fucking clock spring, and it's driving me insane."

"Wild," Caden warned, but I was past caring about diplomacy.

"What?" I spread my arms wide. "We're stuck together whether we like it or not. Might as well be honest about it."

Elias stood abruptly, his magic crackling around him despite Professor Blackwood's warnings. "You want honesty? Fine. Yes, I'm scared."

"See? That wasn't so hard—"

"I'm scared that I'm going to be stuck here with *you* for the rest of the semester." His magic arced over his skin as he stared at me, his brows furrowed in fury. "The last thing I wanted was to get stuck with some sloppy, egotistical fairy who's so busy stroking himself that he can't see that the world doesn't revolve around him!"

The words hit me like a physical blow, and I felt my own magic surge in response. The air between us crackled with hostile energy as our pendants began to glow beneath our shirts.

"Sloppy?" I snarled, jumping to my feet. "At least I don't spend every waking moment trying to be someone else's perfect little puppet!"

"Stop!" Caden shouted, but we were beyond hearing him now.

Elias stepped forward, his usually perfect composure completely shattered. "You think you're so free, so enlightened, but you're just as trapped as I am. At least I'm honest about my chains."

"Honest?" I laughed bitterly. "You wouldn't know honest if it bit you on your perfectly sculpted ass. You're a fucking coward hiding behind Mommy and Daddy's expectations!"

The magic building between us was becoming dangerous now. Books rattled on their shelves, and I could hear glass cracking somewhere in the room. But I was too angry to care, too fed up with his constant judgment bleeding through our bond.

“At least I don’t stick my dick in anything that moves to avoid taking responsibility,” Elias shot back, his voice shaking with rage. “And I don’t parade my pathetic insecurity like it’s something to be proud of!”

That crossed a line I didn’t even know I had, ringing far truer than I ever wanted to admit. My magic exploded outward, wild and uncontrolled, slamming into his structured defenses like a hurricane hitting a house of cards. For a moment, our powers clashed in the space between us, fae chaos meeting witch precision in a display that would have been beautiful if it weren’t so destructive.

“That’s it!” I roared. “I’m done with this bullshit. I’d rather risk magical burnout than spend another second listening to your prissy whining!”

I spun toward the door, my hand already on the handle, when Caden’s voice cut through my fury.

“Wild, don’t!”

“No, Caden! I’m going!” I turned back only for a second, pointing a threatening finger at Elias. “I fucking hate you.”

“Yeah, well, the feeling’s mutual, jackass,” he called back.

But I barely heard him as I slammed the door behind me hard enough to rattle the entire hallway. I needed air, space, freedom from the suffocating weight of Elias’s disapproval and fear. The bond pulled at me immediately, a sharp ache in my chest that I ignored as I stormed down the corridor.

Students pressed themselves against the walls as I passed, probably sensing the unstable magic radiating from me in waves. Good. Let them stay out of my way.

I made it out to the front lawn of the dormitory before the first wave of nausea hit.

By the time I reached the main courtyard of the Academy, my hands were shaking. The pendant around my neck had gone from warm to burning hot, and every step felt like I was walking through quicksand.

But I couldn’t go back, couldn’t stand to be around Elias any longer. I hated him, hated what he stood for, and hated the pristine sharp edges of his mind, thoughts, and manners.

I collapsed onto a stone bench near the fountain, doubling over as another wave of magical feedback crashed through me. The pendant was scalding against my skin now, and I could feel my fae magic starting to unravel at the edges.

Fuck. This was worse than I’d expected.

My vision blurred as I tried to focus on the dancing water in front of me. Students were giving me a wide berth, probably smart considering the sparks literally flying off my fingertips. I pressed my palms against my temples, trying to contain the chaos building in my skull. This magic was nothing like my own. This was threatening to consume me, to swallow me whole and destroy me completely.

The bond stretched between us like a rubber band pulled to its breaking point. I could still feel Elias in the back of my mind, his anger mixing with what felt suspiciously like panic. Good. Let him panic. Let him feel what it was like when his perfect world got messy.

Another surge of nausea hit me, this one strong enough to double me over completely. My magic was eating itself, consuming the very pathways it normally flowed through. At this rate, I’d burn out my abilities entirely within the hour.

But even that seemed preferable to going back and apologizing to that uptight, judgmental—

“Wild!”

I looked up to see Atlas jogging toward me, Caden close behind. Even through my deteriorating vision, I could see the worry etched across both their faces.

“Don’t,” I managed to gasp out as they approached. “Don’t make me go back. I can’t stand it anymore…” I looked up at Caden, tears forming in my eyes despite myself. “I don’t even want to be at this school, Caden! I didn’t want to come back… but I… I didn’t have a choice…”

I didn’t understand why all my long-buried emotions were suddenly bubbling to the surface. It was so much all at once and too much to bear. I felt myself sway as my vision tunneled in. But before I hit the ground, I felt a strong pair of arms catch me as if I were no heavier than a feather. I glanced up to see both Atlas and Caden staring down at me.

“Please,” I begged, my emotions and magic consuming me. “I… I just want to be free…”

Atlas lifted me effortlessly, his werewolf strength making my weight inconsequential. “We need to get him back to Elias,” he said grimly to Caden. “Now.”

“No,” I protested weakly, but my voice came out as barely a whisper. The magical feedback was intensifying, making it feel like my very essence was being shredded from the inside out.

“Wild, you’re dying,” Caden said, his face pale with fear as he kept pace with Atlas’s long strides. “Your magic is literally consuming itself. I can see it happening. And it’s gonna start happening to me soon if we don’t get back.”

I wanted to argue, wanted to tell them I’d rather die than spend another minute with that pretentious asshole, but another wave of agony crashed through me. My fae magic was unraveling like a poorly knitted sweater, each thread of power snapping and recoiling back on itself.

“Fuck,” I gasped, my head lolling against Atlas’s shoulder. “It hurts so bad.”

“I know,” Atlas murmured, his voice surprisingly gentle for someone I didn’t know that well. “Just hold on.”

The academy grounds stretched endlessly before us, each step Atlas took sending fresh jolts of pain through my nervous system. Students scattered as we approached the dorm, probably sensing the dangerous instability radiating from my failing magic.

"Elias!" Caden shouted as we reached the door to our room. "Open up! Now!"

There was a pause, then the sound of footsteps. The door swung open to reveal Elias, his face still flushed with anger until he saw me in Atlas's arms.

"What happened?" he demanded, his tone shifting instantly from hostile to concerned.

"The bond," Caden explained as Atlas carried me inside. "Wild's magic is burning itself out. You need to stabilize the connection."

Elias stepped back as Atlas lowered me onto my bed, his brown eyes wide with what looked like genuine fear. "I don't know how—"

"Figure it out!" Atlas snapped, his usual calm demeanor cracking. "Because if Wild dies, Caden's going to be devastated, and I'll hold you personally responsible for hurting my *mate*."

Elias took a step backward. "Mate?!"

"That's right," Atlas snarled. "And I'm on the wrestling team. So if you don't want me to ring your fucking neck, you better fix this."

I felt a weak laugh bubble up from my chest. "Threatening... the Thorne heir... for me? That's... sweet..."

"Shut up and save your strength," Atlas said, but there was warmth in his voice.

Elias hovered at the foot of my bed, his hands clenched into fists. I could feel his internal struggle through our fraying connection. His anger at me was warring with his obvious distress at seeing me in pain.

"I can feel it," he said quietly. "The bond. It's... it's tearing apart."

"Then fix it," Caden pleaded. "Please, Elias. I know you two don't like each other, but this isn't worth killing one another over. And… he's my best friend."

Elias stared at me, his face a battlefield of emotions I could barely comprehend through the haze of pain engulfing me. His pristine appearance had crumbled. His hair was disheveled, his eyes wild with something between fear and determination.

"I don't know how," he whispered, but he moved closer anyway, perching hesitantly on the edge of my bed.

Another wave of agony crashed through me, and I couldn't hold back the scream that tore from my throat. My magic was unraveling faster now, tendrils of fae energy dissipating into the air like smoke. The pendant against my chest burned with such intensity, I was certain it would leave a permanent scar.

"Just touch him," Atlas growled, his patience clearly wearing thin. "Caden said when you three were in physical contact before, it stabilized the bond."

Elias's eyes widened. "You mean—"

"For fuck's sake," I gasped between waves of pain, "just hold my hand or something before I explode."

Hesitantly, as if I might burn him, Elias reached out and wrapped his fingers around mine. The effect was immediate. A cooling rush washed over me that temporarily dampened the fire consuming me from within. But it wasn't enough.

"More," Caden urged, watching anxiously as the magic continued to leak from me in erratic bursts. "The connection's still too weak."

Elias looked panicked. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Remember the quad," I managed to say, my voice barely audible. "When you kissed me."

His face flushed crimson. "That was—"

"The strongest the bond has ever been," Caden finished for me. "Wild's right. Physical contact intensifies the connection."

Atlas stepped back, pulling Caden with him. "We'll give you some privacy."

"No," Elias protested, but another violent tremor wracked my body, and his objection died on his lips.

I could feel his conflict through our bond, embarrassment, anger, fear, and underneath it all, a reluctant acknowledgment that he didn't want me to die, despite everything. His structured magic was reaching out instinctively, trying to contain my chaotic energy before it self-destructed completely.

"I can't believe I'm doing this," he muttered, and then with sudden resolution, he climbed fully onto the bed.

Before I could process what was happening, Elias was straddling me, his hands cupping my face with unexpected gentleness. His brown eyes locked with mine, and I saw something shift in them, a determination replacing his hesitation.

"If you tell anyone I did this willingly, I'll deny it," he whispered, and then he pressed his lips to mine.

The world exploded into light. Not the painful, destructive kind that had been tearing me apart, but something warm and enveloping. Where our bodies connected, magic flowed between us, his orderly patterns weaving with my fae chaos with a surprising amount of harmony.

The kiss deepened, his lips surprisingly soft against mine, and suddenly I was drowning in Elias. The precision of his magic flowed into me like cool water, dousing the fire that had been consuming my power. His structured energy filled the fraying edges of my own, weaving them back together strand by strand.

I felt my hands move of their own accord, sliding up his back and pulling him closer. He made a small sound of surprise against my mouth, but didn't pull away. Instead, his fingers tangled in my hair, the contact sending new waves of stabilizing energy cascading through me.

The pendant between us pulsed with a steady rhythm, no longer burning but pleasantly warm. I could feel Elias's heartbeat accelerating to match mine, our pulses synchronizing as our magic intertwined.

"It's working," I heard Caden whisper from somewhere distant.

But I barely registered the words. All I could focus on was Elias. His weight on top of me, the taste of peppermint on his tongue, and the unexpected hunger in the way he kissed me back consumed my senses. This wasn't the reluctant contact of someone merely trying to save my life. There was something else there, something he'd been suppressing.

When he finally pulled back, his eyes were wide with shock, lips slightly swollen. We stared at each other, both breathing hard, neither quite believing what had just happened.

"I still hate you," he whispered, his voice rough.

"Y-Yeah," I nodded, barely able to form words. "I can tell."

"Goddammit," Caden whined a few feet away.

I glanced over to see him tugging down his sweatshirt, trying to cover up his obvious erection. Next to him, Atlas was sniffing at the air, his own jeans bulging dangerously.

"Fuck," the werewolf jock muttered, his breath heavy. He stared at his mate, his eyes filled with lust. "When were you gonna tell me about *that* part of this new bond?"

CHAPTER 7

ELIAS

I stood in the shower, letting the hot water run down my body. Thankfully, this new magical bond allowed me to leave the room once in a while without any extreme consequences. Here in the shower, I could barely feel the other two, even though they were only fifty or so feet away. It gave me some much needed peace, a break from the constant input of their emotions, magic, and thoughts.

I closed my eyes, feeling the water drum against my shoulders as I tried to sort through the chaotic tangle of emotions that weren't entirely my own. Four days of being magically bound to Wild and Caden had left me constantly on edge, unable to find even a moment's peace except for these brief escapes to the bathroom.

Wild's presence was particularly overwhelming, a constant surge of chaotic energy and unfiltered desire that crashed against my carefully constructed walls like waves against a cliff. Every time I thought I'd built my defenses high enough, another wave of his emotions would sweep through me, leaving me disoriented and... aroused.

That was the part I couldn't admit to anyone, not even myself. The way my body responded to him was unprecedented and terrifying. I'd never felt such intense attraction before, certainly not to another man, and definitely not to someone as reckless and inappropriate as Wild.

My hand drifted down my stomach of its own accord, fingers wrapping around my hardening cock. I bit my lip to stifle a groan as I began to stroke myself, images of Wild's smirking face flashing behind my closed eyelids. The memory of his kiss in the quad, of his body below me when I'd saved him from magical burnout, sent heat spiraling through my core.

"Fuck," I whispered, my strokes becoming more urgent. I could feel him even now, his presence in the back of my mind like background music that occasionally surged to the forefront. Was he aware of what I was doing? Could he feel my desire the way I sometimes felt his?

The thought should have horrified me, should have made me stop immediately. Instead, it only intensified my arousal. I leaned against the tile wall, water cascading down my chest as I worked myself faster, imagining Wild's hands on me instead of my own.

Wild had a reputation on campus, of being an insatiable slut. And thanks to his constant practice in the fae realm, I had a feeling he was exceptionally good at it. I got lost thinking about all the ways he could pleasure me and all the ways he knew that I couldn't even fathom. The fantasy was vibrant, and I could almost feel his hands on me, his mouth around my cock, and the sweet tightness of his ass as he bounced on my cock in my mind's eye.

When I came, it was with his name caught between my teeth, my body shuddering with an intensity that left me gasping. Shame followed almost immediately, crashing over me harder than any wave of Wild's emotions ever had.

What was wrong with me? I'd never had time to think about attraction, much less sex. Sure, I'd taken time to jerk off here and there when I was alone, imagining some unknown stranger who wanted to please me. But this was different. I'd never been this out of control, this desperate. It had to be the magic manipulating my desires, making me want things I shouldn't want.

But even as I thought it, I knew it wasn't entirely true. The binding might have amplified everything, but it couldn't create feelings from nothing. Which meant these desires had been inside me all along, buried beneath layers of expectation and propriety. I wanted chaos, sex, and freedom. I just *couldn't* have it.

I quickly rinsed off, desperate to escape my own thoughts. As I stepped out of the shower and reached for a towel, I felt a sudden surge of amusement that wasn't my own. Wild. He was laughing about something, the sensation bubbling through our connection like champagne.

"Get out of my head," I muttered, wrapping the towel around my waist with more force than necessary.

But I knew he wasn't doing it intentionally. The connection worked both ways, after all. Just as I felt his emotions bleeding into mine, he likely caught fragments of my thoughts and feelings. The idea that he might have sensed what I'd just been doing in the shower made my stomach clench with mortification.

I dressed quickly, pulling on a clean shirt and pants with sharp, efficient movements. When I opened the dorm room door, I

found Wild lounging on his bed, flipping through a book and looking bored. He looked up as I entered, and I caught a flash of something in his green eyes before he masked it with his usual smirk.

"Feel better?" he asked, his tone carefully neutral.

"Fine," I replied stiffly, moving toward my bed in the corner. Caden was nowhere to be seen, probably off with that werewolf Atlas again on the roof. It was the closest place they could get privacy. Lucky bastard got to escape this suffocating tension.

Wild set his book aside and stretched, the movement causing his shirt to ride up and expose a strip of pale skin above his jeans. I forced myself to look away, but not before noticing the way his muscles moved beneath the fabric. I really wished he would stop being so hot. It was annoying.

"You know," he said conversationally, "the bond goes both ways."

My blood turned to ice. "What's that supposed to mean?"

He sat up, swinging his legs over the side of the bed to face me. "It means I can feel what you're feeling sometimes. Especially when the emotions are... *intense*."

Heat flooded my face, and my cock twitched in my pants despite my recent orgasm. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sure you don't." Wild stood, moving closer with that fluid grace that seemed effortless. "But just so you know, there's nothing to be ashamed of. We're all dealing with some pretty overwhelming urges thanks to this thing." He gestured vaguely at the pendant beneath his shirt.

"It's the magic," I said quickly, desperate to maintain some semblance of dignity. "It's affecting our judgment, making us feel things that aren't real."

Wild stopped directly in front of me, close enough that I could smell his skin, warm and slightly wild like summer rain. "Is that what you tell yourself?"

"It's the truth."

"Bullshit." His voice was soft but certain. "Magic can amplify what's already there, but it can't create something from nothing. If you're feeling it, some part of it was real to begin with."

I wanted to argue, to deny what he was saying, but the words stuck in my throat. Because deep down, I knew he was right. The attraction, the curiosity, the desperate longing for something beyond my carefully controlled existence. It had all been there before the binding, buried so deep I'd almost convinced myself it didn't exist.

"What do you want from me?" I whispered.

Wild's expression softened slightly. "I want you to stop hating yourself for being human."

"I'm not human," I said automatically, the correction falling from my lips before I could stop it. "I'm a witch."

Wild rolled his eyes. "You know what I mean. Stop hating yourself for having wants and needs that don't fit into your parents' perfect little box."

I stepped back, putting distance between us, but he followed. "You don't understand. My family—"

"Your family isn't here," he interrupted, his voice taking on an edge. "It's just us. Just you, me, and Caden trying to figure out how to live with this bond without killing each other."

"And how's that working out?" I asked bitterly. "We can barely be in the same room without fighting or..." I trailed off, not wanting to voice what the alternative was.

"Or what?" Wild pressed, moving closer again. "Or wanting to rip each other's clothes off? Because that's what this is really about, isn't it? You're terrified that you might actually want me."

My back hit the wall, and I realized he'd been steadily backing me into the corner. "I don't—"

"Feel this," he said, placing his hand flat against my chest. The contact sent electricity shooting through me, our magic responding immediately to the touch. "Feel how our power wants to merge. Feel how right this is, even when everything else is chaos. That has to mean something."

I could feel it. The way his wild fae energy called to something deep inside me, something that had been locked away for so long I'd forgotten it existed. It was terrifying and exhilarating and completely beyond my control.

"This is insane," I breathed, but I didn't push him away.

"Good," Wild murmured, his face inches from mine. "Insane is better than whatever repressed nightmare you've been living."

Before I could respond, the door burst open and Caden stumbled in, his hair mussed and his lips swollen. He stopped short when he saw us, his eyes widening.

"Oh," he said, his cheeks flushing red. "I can come back later—"

"No," I said quickly, pushing Wild away and straightening my shirt. "We were just... discussing the bond."

Caden's eyebrows rose. "Is that what we're calling it now?"

Wild laughed, the sound rich and unrepentant. "Elias was just having some revelations about his sexuality. Very educational."

"I hate you," I muttered, but there was less venom in it than usual.

"No," Wild said, his green eyes sparkling with mischief and something deeper. "You really don't." He tapped the crystal hanging around his neck. "I can feel it."

"You two didn't kill each other, did you?" Atlas asked, his deep voice filling the room as he stepped in behind Caden.

"Not yet," Wild grinned. "There's still daylight left though, so don't count your chickens yet."

Atlas raised an eyebrow, his keen werewolf senses no doubt picking up on the charged atmosphere in the room. "Right. Well, I brought you all dinner." He held up a bag from the campus dining hall. "Figured you three might be too busy... bonding... to remember to eat."

"Thanks," Caden said, shooting me an apologetic look. "We should probably all eat together, anyway. Professor Blackwood said maintaining the connection works better when we're in close proximity."

Wild flopped back onto his bed with theatrical flair. "Great. More forced family time with Mr. Sunshine over there."

I bristled at the nickname but found myself oddly disappointed when he moved away. The absence of his presence felt like a sudden drop in temperature, and I had to resist the urge to move closer again.

Atlas unpacked the food with efficient movements, laying out containers on Caden's desk. "So, how are you three handling this whole situation? Really?"

"Terribly," I said at the same time Wild said, "Fantastic."

Caden sighed, settling cross-legged on his bed. "It's... complicated. The emotional bleed-through is intense. Sometimes I can't tell which feelings are mine and which are theirs."

"Tell me about it," I muttered, accepting a container of what looked like shepherd's pie from Atlas. "It's like having two very loud roommates living in my head."

"Only two?" Wild asked with mock hurt. "I feel like I'm hosting a whole fucking convention in here. Elias's anxiety, Caden's horniness for his werewolf boyfriend, my own natural state of chaos..."

"I'm not that horny," Caden protested weakly.

Atlas snorted. "Yes, you are. Trust me. And considering some of your memories that have flashed through my head, you have good reason to be."

The casual way they discussed their relationship made something twist in my chest. Envy, maybe. I'd never had that kind of easy intimacy with anyone, never been able to just be myself without carefully curating every word and action.

"Must be nice," I said before I could stop myself.

"What?" Atlas asked, settling beside Caden with unconscious possessiveness.

"Nothing." I focused on my food, suddenly uncomfortable with the direction of my thoughts.

But Wild was watching me with those too-perceptive eyes. "He means it must be nice to have someone who accepts all your messy parts."

"Wild," I warned, but he ignored me.

"Poor little prince has spent his whole life pretending to be perfect. No wonder he's wound so tight he's about to snap."

"I'm not wound tight—"

"You literally organize your socks by color," Caden pointed out gently.

"And your books by publication date," Wild added.

"Alright," Atlas said, glaring at the other two. "Give the guys a chance to breathe. This is already difficult enough without you two picking on Elias."

Both Wild and Caden looked up at Atlas, looks of surprise on their faces.

"Besides, there's something else we need to talk about," he added, suddenly turning red. "It seems the mate bond I share with Caden is bleeding through your bond. And that's making me… feel things."

"Feel things?" Wild chuckled. "Like what?"

Atlas looked up. "Like I want to fuck you. *All* of you."

I felt my heart race. At the same time, I felt Wild's shock filter through the bond. But Caden didn't seem surprised, just nervous.

"You knew about this?" I asked, looking at Caden.

He nodded. "Atlas told me about it after that night you kissed Wild to stabilize his magic. Apparently, he felt it too."

"Yeah, we noticed," Wild laughed, winking at Atlas.

It was hard to forget honestly. Atlas's jeans had bulged far more than I expected, and the image was burned into my mind. I'd heard the rumors about Alpha werewolves and their… *packages*.

"So…" I said, shaking my head in a vain attempt to clear my thoughts. "What do we do about it?"

"Atlas and I have discussed it, and we decided… that if you two are… you know…"

Atlas crossed his arms over his chest, staring at both Wild and I with hungry eyes. "A foursome. If you're interested."

CHAPTER 8
WILD

"A foursome is fine with me," I said as the four of us headed toward the cafeteria for dinner. "That's nothing compared to the things I do every summer at home." I glanced over at Caden. "I never thought I'd sleep with you or your boyfriend, but I can't say I haven't noticed how cute the both of you are."

Caden blushed furiously, his pale skin turning a shade of pink that made his freckles stand out even more prominently against his cheeks. "Wild!" he hissed, glancing nervously at the other students milling about campus after dark. "Keep your voice down."

Elias walked stiffly beside me, his shoulders so tense they were practically touching his ears. Through our bond, I could feel his conflicted emotions, disgust warring with curiosity, proper decorum battling primal desire. And the distinct fear of a *virgin*. I decided I would keep that part to myself.

"What?" I grinned, deliberately bumping my shoulder against his. "Scared someone might hear that the perfect Thorne heir is considering getting down and dirty with a fae and a half-breed?"

"That's not—" Elias started, then stopped, taking a deep breath. "Can we please discuss this somewhere private? Not in the middle of campus where anyone could overhear?"

Atlas chuckled, his arm protectively around Caden's shoulders. "He has a point, Wild. This isn't exactly outside conversation."

"Fine," I sighed dramatically. "But don't think you're getting out of it, Princess. I've felt what goes through your head when you look at me. And at Atlas." I wiggled my eyebrows suggestively. "Especially when he shows up in that stringy little tank top after wrestling practice."

"I do not—" Elias spluttered, but the flare of embarrassment that shot through our connection told a different story.

We rounded the student center toward the main cafeteria building, the trees casting long shadows across the courtyard under the light of the half-moon. The air felt different somehow, charged with an energy that made the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

"Do you feel that?" Caden asked quietly, his steps slowing.

I nodded, my usual playful demeanor fading as I sensed it too. There was a magical disturbance rippling through the ambient energy of the campus. Something wasn't right.

"It feels like..." Elias began, his brow furrowed in concentration.

"A ward being broken," I finished for him, our magical senses aligning through the bond.

Atlas tensed beside us, his nostrils flaring. "I smell something wrong. Something... burnt."

We had only made it halfway across the courtyard when the first explosion hit. A blast of magical energy erupted from the cafeteria building ahead, shattering windows and sending a wave of heat rolling toward us. Students screamed, scattering in all directions as debris rained down. The massive dome of protection surrounding the entire campus shattered into a million tiny shards of light.

Widdershins Academy was no longer hidden.

"What the fuck?!" Atlas growled, instinctively pulling Caden behind him. "How is that even possible?!"

But I didn't get a chance to answer. Through the smoke and chaos, I saw them, a group of cloaked figures emerging from the cafeteria entrance, their hands glowing with malevolent energy. One of them pointed directly at us.

"There he is! The Thorne boy!"

"Elias, run!" I shouted, grabbing his arm and pulling him behind a stone planter as another blast of magic scorched the ground where we'd been standing.

The attackers moved with coordinated precision, their dark cloaks billowing as they advanced across the courtyard. I counted six of them, each wielding a different type of corrupted magic that made my fae senses recoil. This wasn't wild magic or even structured witch magic. It was something twisted, perverted from its natural state, something meant only to destroy.

"They're after me?" Elias gasped, his face pale with shock. "Why would they—"

"Questions later," Atlas snarled, his body already beginning to shift. Bones cracked as his shoulders broadened, dark fur rippling across his skin. "Get to safety!"

But there was nowhere to run. The attackers had split into two groups, flanking us from both sides. Students were screaming, fleeing in all directions as professors rushed from nearby buildings, their own protective spells flaring to life too late.

"The binding," Caden whispered urgently, grabbing both Elias and me by the wrists. "We need to use it!"

"Professor Blackwood said no magic," Elias protested automatically, even as one of the attackers hurled a ball of sickly green energy toward us.

I yanked him down as the spell exploded against the planter, sending chunks of stone flying. "Fuck what Blackwood said! They're trying to kill us!"

Through our connection, I felt Elias's fear and confusion swirling like a whirlpool, threatening to pull us all under. But beneath it was something else, a core of raw power that he kept tightly leashed, locked behind years of rigid training and family expectations.

"Let go," I urged, squeezing his hand. "For once in your life, Elias, let go!"

Atlas had fully shifted now, his massive black wolf form launching itself at the nearest attacker. Teeth flashed in the moonlight as he clamped down on a bare arm, but the witch merely laughed, a hollow, unnatural sound, and sent Atlas flying with a casual flick of their wrist.

"Atlas!" Caden screamed as the werewolf slammed into a tree trunk with a sickening crack.

Something snapped in Caden then. I felt it through our bond, a surge of protective fury that made the ground beneath us tremble. Vines erupted from the manicured lawn, thick as my wrist, whipping toward the attackers with deadly intent.

"That's it!" I yelled, letting my own fae magic flow freely for the first time since the binding. The pendant around my neck flared to life, burning hot against my skin as I called up illusions so real they could cut, mirror shards of light that sliced through the air toward our enemies.

But the leader of the group merely raised a hand, and both my illusions and Caden's vines disintegrated into ash. The magical backlash hit us like a physical blow, sending us staggering.

"Pathetic," the leader called out, pushing back their hood to reveal a woman with silver-streaked hair and cold eyes. "Is this the best the academy can offer? A half-breed, a fae whore, and the great hope of the Thorne family?"

Elias's grip on my hand tightened painfully. Through our bond, I felt something shift inside him. Rage replaced fear, and determination overtook confusion.

"Stay behind me," he whispered, his voice different somehow, resonating with power I'd never felt from him before.

"What are you—"

Before I could finish, Elias stepped forward, placing himself between us and the attackers. The pendant at his chest blazed with blinding light, and I felt a strange pulling sensation, as if he were drawing magic not just from himself but from me and Caden as well.

"You want me?" Elias called out, his normally perfect posture now radiating dangerous power. "Here I am."

The leader laughed again. "Surrender now, boy. Your family's betrayal must be answered with blood."

"My family?" Elias's confusion flickered briefly through our bond, but he didn't falter. "I don't know what you're talking about, but you made a mistake coming here."

"The Thornes promised us you would join our cause," another attacker snarled. "Your father assured us his son understood the need for purity."

I watched Elias's face harden as understanding dawned. "My father doesn't speak for me."

He raised his hands, and I gasped as pure magical energy began to swirl around him. It wasn't the structured, formulaic spells I'd seen him practice, but something older, wilder. It was magic none of us knew how to use or control, but he was doing it, somehow, on instinct.

"Elias," I warned, feeling the bond between us stretching dangerously as his magic built to impossible levels. "You can't channel that much power alone!"

But he wasn't listening. The air around him crackled with electricity, the scent of ozone and something ancient filling my nostrils. Through our connection, I could feel him reaching for something beyond himself, beyond even our binding, something primal that lived in the spaces between realms.

The leader raised her staff, dark energy coalescing at its tip. "Kill him! Kill them all!"

Six streams of corrupted magic shot toward us like vipers striking. Elias threw up his hands, and a shield of pure energy materialized, but it was already fracturing under the assault, his untrained wild magic buckling beneath the coordinated attack.

"He can't hold it!" Caden shouted, dragging himself toward Atlas's fallen form.

I made a split-second decision. Lunging forward, I wrapped my arms around Elias from behind, pressing my chest against his back. The moment we touched, our pendants flared in unison, and I felt our magic interlace like fingers intertwined. The

shield solidified, turning from transparent to a swirling opal barrier that reflected the attackers' spells back at them.

"What are you doing?" Elias gasped, his body trembling with the effort of channeling so much power.

"Helping you, idiot," I growled in his ear. "You can't do this alone."

Through our connection, I pushed my chaotic fae energy into his structured channels, feeling the way our magics fought before finding an unexpected harmony. The sensation was intoxicating, like nothing I'd ever experienced before, wild and precise all at once.

"Caden!" I called out. "We need you!"

Caden hesitated, torn between us and Atlas's unconscious form. The leader of the attackers seized the moment, redirecting her staff toward him.

"The half-breed dies first," she snarled.

Time seemed to slow. I watched the bolt of sickly energy streak toward Caden, saw his eyes widen in terror, felt Elias's panic surge through our bond. Without thinking, I reached through our connection, grabbing hold of Elias's magic and pulled *hard*.

The world exploded into light and sensation. Elias screamed as power poured from him into me, far more than I could safely handle. My fae nature responded instinctively, channeling the overflow toward Caden through our shared bond.

The moment it touched him, something extraordinary happened. Caden's dryad heritage awakened in a dramatic display. His skin took on a greenish hue, and leaves sprouted across his body as he thrust his hands forward. The bolt meant to kill him dissipated against a wall of thorny vines that erupted from the ground, encircling Atlas's fallen form protectively.

"Impossible," the leader whispered, taking a step back.

But we weren't done. The three-way connection between us had stabilized, magic flowing in a perfect circuit that amplified with each passing second. I felt myself shifting, my true fae form emerging. I was taller, wilder, my skin glowing with internal light and my hair moving as if underwater.

"You wanted to see what the Thorne heir is capable of?" I laughed, my voice echoing with otherworldly resonance. "Let us show you."

Elias turned in my embrace, his eyes now glowing with golden light. When he spoke, his voice overlapped with mine, the words coming from both of us simultaneously.

"If you threaten one, you threaten all."

The leader raised her staff defensively. "W-What is this magic? This isn't—"

Elias and I moved as one, our hands weaving patterns in the air that neither of us fully understood. Ancient symbols appeared, burning with blue-white fire. The attackers scrambled backward, their coordinated assault dissolving into panic as the symbols coalesced into a swirling vortex between our outstretched hands.

"This is old magic," I heard myself say, though the voice didn't sound entirely like my own. Something was speaking through us, using our bodies as conduits. "Magic that still remembers when the realms were one."

Elias's body pressed against mine, our energies fusing completely as the power built to a crescendo. The leader of the attackers flung spell after spell at us, but each one dissipated harmlessly against our combined aura.

"Retreat!" she screamed to her followers, but it was too late.

With a sound like thunder cracking the sky, the vortex between our hands expanded outward, engulfing the courtyard in blinding light. I felt Elias's consciousness merging with mine, our thoughts and memories flowing together until I couldn't tell where he ended and I began. Through him, I felt Caden too, his vine-like energy weaving through both of us, grounding the wild power that threatened to consume everything.

When the light faded, the attackers lay scattered across the courtyard, unconscious but alive. The magic had stripped them of their strange and unnatural corrupted power, leaving them as ordinary witches once more, and not the strongest ones at that.

I swayed on my feet, suddenly exhausted beyond measure. Elias wrapped his arms around me before I could fall, both of us barely remaining standing.

"What... what did we just do?" he whispered, his voice trembling.

I looked up into his face, seeing him truly for the first time. Behind the perfect facade was someone just as lost and searching as I was, someone who'd been hiding his true self for so long he'd almost forgotten it existed.

"Something impossible," I replied, my fingers tracing the line of his jaw without my conscious permission. "Something beautiful."

But before either of us could say anything else, my head swam and my vision tunneled in. Both of us dropped to our knees, our arms still wrapped around one another. I got one last look at those beautiful brown eyes before my world went dark.

CHAPTER 9

ELIAS

I was sitting on the edge of Wild's bed, his ginger hair disheveled after the incident. He'd been slipping in and out of consciousness for the past twelve hours, our combined magic having taken the largest toll on him. Even when he was asleep, I could feel him there, his thoughts racing as his brain tried to make sense of everything that had happened. Now and then his mind slipped back to the fae realm, bringing on far sweeter memories so he could rest. Most of them were sexual, and I did my best to ignore them. I wasn't sure I was quite ready for a front-row seat to that just yet, no matter how curious I was.

"Water," Wild croaked, his green eyes fluttering open once more. "Please."

I reached for the glass on the nightstand, my hand trembling slightly from my own exhaustion. As I helped him lift his head, our fingers brushed, sending a familiar spark of connection between us. Through our bond, I felt his gratitude mingled with a flicker of amusement.

"What's so funny?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper. The infirmary was quiet. Most of the other students who'd been injured in the attack were now stable enough to return to their dorms.

"You," Wild murmured after taking a sip. "Sitting there all concerned. Never thought I'd see the day Elias Thorne would play nurse for me." His lips curved into a weak version of his usual smirk. "Though I have to say, the outfit's disappointing. I was hoping for something with a shorter skirt."

Despite everything, I felt heat rise to my cheeks. "You're insufferable, you know that?"

"So I've been told." He winced as he shifted position, the movement sending a ripple of pain through our connection. "Where's Caden?"

"With Atlas in the next room," I replied, setting the glass down. "He's recovering faster than either of us. Professor Blackwood thinks it's because of his dual nature, half-witch, half-dryad. Something about having multiple magical channels to distribute the strain."

Wild nodded weakly. "And the attackers?"

"Gone. The Elder Council arrived an hour after we... after what happened in the courtyard." I hesitated, unsure how to describe what we'd done. "They asked a lot of questions, and none I could really answer."

A shadow passed over Wild's face. "Did they say anything about why they were after you specifically?"

I looked away, focusing on the moonlight filtering through the infirmary windows. "Apparently, my father has been... involved with their group. They call themselves the Purity Front."

"Catchy name," Wild muttered. "Very fascist chic."

"They believe in magical segregation. Keeping the realms separate. Preventing '*mixing*' between different magical races." The words felt bitter on my tongue. "And my father is one of their primary financial backers."

Wild was silent for a moment, his expression unreadable. Through our bond, I felt a complex tangle of emotions, anger, disappointment, and surprisingly, concern. For me.

"Did you know?" he finally asked.

"No," I said quietly. "But I should have. There were signs... comments he'd make about other magical beings, his insistence that I maintain '*proper associations*.' I just never thought he'd go this far."

Wild's hand found mine on the bedspread, his fingers intertwining with mine. The touch sent another wave of connection through us, stronger than before.

"It's not your fault," he said, his voice surprisingly gentle. "Parents have a way of hiding their worst parts from their kids. Believe me, I know."

I felt a rush of curiosity at that last comment. Through our bond, I caught glimpses of Wild's own family, elegant fae nobility with cold smiles and calculating eyes behind their glamorous façades. Nothing like the carefree, chaotic persona he projected.

"Your parents..." I started, but Wild squeezed my hand, cutting me off.

"Not important right now," he said, his mental walls slamming up with surprising force. "What matters is that the Purity

Front thinks you betrayed them. That makes you a target."

I sighed, running my free hand through my hair. "They said my father promised I would join their cause. That I understood the need for '*purity*.'" The disgust in my voice was palpable. "But I never agreed to any of it. I didn't even know."

Wild's thumb traced small circles on my palm, the gesture oddly soothing. "And now you've gone and bonded yourself to a fae and a half-dryad. That's gotta be daddy's worst nightmare."

Despite everything, I felt my lips twitch into a small smile. "I suppose it is, even if I didn't do it on purpose."

He paused, those green eyes looking up at me. "Do you regret it?"

"Honestly?" I sighed, giving him a good long look. "I don't know. I don't want to be part of his *purity* rampage… but I don't think I want to be forcefully connected to… *anyone*." Another deep breath as I felt Wild's curiosity surge. "Being this close to anyone is new, especially non-witches."

"You really have been brought up away from everyone else, haven't you?"

"Yeah," I nodded. "The last person in my family to even talk to a fae for more than five minutes was probably my grandmother. And I only found out about that the day I came back to Widdershins."

Wild's eyes widened with interest, a spark of energy returning to his weary features. "Your grandmother knew fae? Tell me more."

I hesitated, glancing toward the door to make sure we were still alone. "Our house witch, Varina, gave me some of her things before I came back to school without telling my parents. A journal, some artifacts, and..." I paused, remembering the photograph. "A picture of her with someone from the Seelie Court. At Briar Hall, actually. I… I wonder if Varina knew what was going to happen."

"Briar Hall?" Wild's voice cracked with surprise, and he tried to sit up straighter before wincing. "That's... that's my family's estate. The main seat of our house in the fae realm."

"What?" I stared at him, processing this revelation.

"Obviously! Why do you think Professor Blackwood calls me Mr. Briar Hall? That's where I'm from!" He paused, smirking at me. "I thought you were supposed to be smart?"

I glared at him for a moment before continuing. "So, you mean my grandmother knew your family?"

"Probably. Or maybe she just attended one of the summer gatherings. Briar Hall hosts a lot of diplomatic events." Wild's expression grew thoughtful. "What did this fae look like? In the picture?"

I closed my eyes, trying to recall the details. "Tall, willowy. Hair that seemed to be made of autumn leaves and copper. Eyes that were almost too bright. And they were standing very close to my grandmother, like they were..." I trailed off, heat rising to my cheeks.

"Like they were lovers," Wild finished softly. His grip on my hand tightened. "Elias, I think your grandmother might have been bonded to one of my ancestors."

The words hit me like a physical blow. "That's impossible. My family has records going back centuries. There's no mention of any fae connections."

"Of course there isn't," Wild said with a bitter laugh. "The Thorne family would hardly advertise that their precious bloodline had been '*contaminated*.' But it would explain a lot."

"Such as?"

"Such as why our magic worked so well together during the attack. Such as why the binding between us formed so quickly and so strongly." Wild's eyes searched mine. "Elias, I think we're connected by more than just those resonance stones."

Before I could respond, the infirmary door opened and Professor Blackwood entered, her usually pristine appearance somewhat disheveled. Dark circles shadowed her eyes, and her normally perfect hair was pulled back in a hasty bun.

"Mr. Thorne, Mr. Briar Hall," she said, her voice carrying an edge of exhaustion. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I got hit by a magical freight train," Wild replied with his usual irreverence, though he didn't release my hand. "But I'll live."

Professor Blackwood's gaze lingered on our joined hands for a moment before she pulled up a chair. "We need to discuss what happened in the courtyard. The magic you three wielded... it shouldn't have been possible."

"You're telling us," I muttered. "I still don't understand how we did it."

"The resonance stones were designed to amplify wild magic, but what you accomplished went far beyond that," Professor Blackwood continued, her piercing gaze moving between Wild and me. "You accessed something that predates modern magical theory entirely. Something that hasn't been seen for over three centuries."

Wild shifted against his pillows, wincing. "Three centuries? That's oddly specific."

"Because that's when the last recorded instance of a triune bond occurred," she said, pulling out a leather-bound notebook. "A magical connection between three individuals that creates a power exponentially greater than the sum of its parts."

I felt my stomach drop. "Are you saying we're permanently bound? All three of us?"

"I'm saying that what happened last night suggests the possibility." Professor Blackwood opened her notebook, revealing pages of hastily scrawled notes and diagrams. "The way your magic synchronized, the ease with which you channeled ancient

power... it's consistent with historical accounts of triune bonds."

Through our connection, I felt Wild's mind racing, a mixture of fascination and alarm flooding through him. "And what happened to the last people who formed one of these bonds?"

Professor Blackwood's expression darkened. "They were hunted down and killed by those who feared their power."

The silence that followed was deafening. I could hear my own heartbeat, feel Wild's pulse through our joined hands, sense the weight of what she was telling us settling over the room like a shroud.

"By who?" I asked, though I suspected I already knew the answer.

"The Purity Front's predecessors," she confirmed grimly. "They've existed in various forms for centuries, always working to prevent what they see as '*unnatural*' magical combinations. Last night's attack wasn't random, Mr. Thorne. They came specifically to prevent you from fully awakening whatever power lies dormant in your bloodline."

Wild's grip on my hand tightened. "But they failed."

"Did they?" Professor Blackwood asked pointedly. "Or did they accomplish something else entirely?"

I stared at her, confusion swirling through me. "What do you mean?"

"Think about it. You've now openly defied your father's organization. You've formed connections with exactly the type of magical beings they oppose. And you've demonstrated power that will make you a target for the rest of your life." She leaned forward. "They may not have killed you, but they've certainly destroyed any chance you had of living a normal life."

The truth of her words hit me like ice water. My carefully ordered world, my family's expectations, my future as the Thorne heir... it was all gone now. Burned away in a courtyard full of wild magic and impossible connections.

Professor Blackwood was quiet for a long moment, studying us both. When she finally spoke, her voice was barely above a whisper. "And I'm sorry to say, this entire situation is my fault." She looked up, tears threatening at the corners of her eyes. "I chose the three of you for this independent study… but I never imagined something like this would happen… I… I'm so sorry."

I'd never seen Professor Blackwood so emotional before and considering the look on Wild's face, neither had he. We both sat there silently for a long moment. I wondered what I should do. Should I console her? She was the professor, so shouldn't she be consoling me? It wasn't her head on the chopping block, but mine.

"Professor," I said, clearing my throat. "I actually want to thank you."

"Thank me?!" she scoffed, brushing away a tear. "Whatever for?"

"Well, if you hadn't pulled me into all this insanity… I might've been coerced into joining my parent's disgusting scheme." I glanced over at Wild as his disbelief surged through our bond. "I wouldn't have gone willingly, but my parents… they know how to control me. They have for years. I have no doubt they would've found a way through magic or some other means. But they're not gonna use me anymore." I turned my attention back to Professor Blackwood. "What can you tell me about my grandmother?"

"Lydia Thorne?" she asked, her tears replaced with brows furrowed in thought. "I don't know much about her, just that she was exceptionally powerful, and that she didn't give birth to your father until much later in life."

I glanced back at Wild, taking a deep breath. "Can you find out?"

"I'm sure I can, but why?"

"Well… there's a chance she was involved with someone at Briar Hall. I'm not sure in what capacity. Possibly a bond."

"Do you think you're like Mr. Cromwell?" she asked, her curiosity piqued as she looked me over. "That you might be part fae?"

"There's no chance of that," I replied, thankful that Wild and I weren't somehow strangely related. "My parents had me tested as a baby to make sure I was of pure blood, and our family has no ties to the fae realm."

"What about you, Mr. Briar Hall?" the professor asked, turning to Wild. "Any chance you are the lovechild of a forbidden bond?"

Wild shook his head. "My parents want me to take their place in the Seelie Court when the time comes, and that requires magical proof of a strict fae ancestry, which I've already passed." He glanced up at me, his green eyes sparkling with curiosity and no small amount of wonder. "If there's a secret lovechild between the Thornes and the Briar Halls, it's not me."

CHAPTER 10
WILD

"I think this is the first time I've been to a class on time," I grinned as we stepped up to Professor Blackwood's private study.

Elias rolled his eyes, but I could feel his amusement rippling through our connection. "A historic moment indeed. Should we commemorate it somehow? Perhaps a plaque?"

"Don't encourage him," Caden muttered, though his lips twitched with a suppressed smile. "He's insufferable enough as it is."

I placed a hand over my heart in mock offense. "Me? Insufferable? I'm a delight."

The three of us had been nearly inseparable since the attack two weeks ago. Not that we had much choice. Our triune bond had only strengthened after our display of wild magic in the courtyard. The pendants now seemed permanently fused to our skin, visible only to us but constantly humming with shared energy.

Elias reached for the door, his fingers brushing mine as we both moved at the same time. A jolt of electricity passed between us, making us both freeze momentarily. These accidental touches had become both more frequent and more intense, each one sending a cascade of sensations through our bond that none of us quite knew how to handle.

"Sorry," he murmured, pulling back to let me open the door instead.

"Don't be," I whispered, just low enough for him to hear.

The dynamic between us had shifted dramatically since that night in the infirmary. Elias was still uptight, still frustratingly proper most of the time, but there were moments, fleeting, precious moments, when his carefully constructed walls would slip, and I'd catch glimpses of the person beneath. Someone curious, passionate, and far more complex than the perfect Thorne heir he pretended to be.

It was driving me… well, *wild*.

Professor Blackwood looked up from her desk as we entered, her silver-streaked hair pulled back in its usual severe bun. "Ah, gentlemen. Right on time. Please, sit."

We arranged ourselves in the now-familiar triangle of chairs before her desk. I sprawled in mine as always, while Elias sat ramrod straight and Caden settled somewhere in between, his posture relaxed but attentive.

"I've found something," Professor Blackwood announced without preamble, placing an ancient-looking leather-bound book on her desk. "It took some... unorthodox research methods, but I believe this text contains information about your grandmother, Mr. Thorne."

Elias leaned forward, his excitement pulsing through our bond. "What did you discover?"

"Lydia Thorne wasn't just acquainted with the Briar Hall family," she said, opening the book to a marked page. "She was part of a secret magical research group that included members of both the Seelie Court and several prominent witch families. They were studying the very thing that's happened to you three, triune bonds."

I watched as Elias reached into his bag, pulling out a small leatherbound journal with yellowed pages. "This is my grandmother's journal," he said, holding it out to the professor. "Some of it I can read, but most of the magic in here… is strange to me. I've been trying to decipher it since we started all this, but I haven't gotten anywhere."

Professor Blackwood's eyes widened as she took the journal, her fingers tracing the worn leather with reverence. "This is extraordinary. Lydia's personal grimoire... I never thought I'd see it."

I leaned forward, my usual sprawl tightening with curiosity. "So, what's the deal with triune bonds? Are we talking about some ancient threesome magic or what?"

Elias shot me a withering look, but I could feel his own curiosity pulsing through our connection.

"Not exactly, Mr. Briar Hall," Professor Blackwood said, though her lips twitched slightly. "According to these texts, triune bonds were once considered the highest form of magical collaboration. A perfect balance of energies. Structure, chaos, and growth."

"That's us," Caden said quietly. "Elias is structure, Wild is chaos, and I'm..."

"Growth," I finished, nudging him with my shoulder. "Plant boy."

Professor Blackwood nodded, flipping through Lydia's journal with careful fingers. "Precisely. In ancient times, before the magical realms were fully separated, these bonds were cultivated deliberately to maintain balance between worlds."

"But why were they hunted down?" Elias asked, his voice tight with tension I could feel rippling through our connection.

Professor Blackwood's expression darkened. "Power, Mr. Thorne. The combined magic of a triune bond threatens those who wish to maintain strict hierarchies between magical communities." She tapped a page in Lydia's journal. "Your grandmother was researching ways to restore these bonds, to heal the rifts between realms."

"And my father's group, whatever it was back then, wanted to stop her," Elias said, his shoulders slumping slightly.

"Not just stop her," Professor Blackwood said grimly. "According to these records, they tried to eliminate her research entirely. And they nearly succeeded."

I reached out instinctively, my fingers brushing against Elias's knee. The contact sent a surge of comfort through our bond, and I felt his gratitude wash back over me.

"So what happened?" Caden asked, leaning forward. "To Lydia and her research group?"

Professor Blackwood glanced between us, hesitation evident in her expression. "They attempted to form a triune bond themselves. Lydia, a fae noble from Briar Hall named Sorrel, and a dryad scholar called Thorne."

"Wait," I interrupted, my pulse quickening. "Sorrel of Briar Hall? That was my great-uncle."

Elias's head snapped toward me, his brown eyes wide. "And Thorne is my family name."

"But you said the dryad's name was Thorne," Caden pointed out, confusion creasing his brow.

Professor Blackwood nodded slowly. "Yes. It appears that some family histories have been... deliberately obscured. The dryad Thorne wasn't related to your family, Elias. He took that name later, after the bond attempt."

"So, what happened to them?" I pressed, feeling Elias's shock reverberate through our connection. "Did their bond work?"

Professor Blackwood's fingers traced the aged paper of Lydia's journal. "Partially. The texts suggest they achieved a temporary connection, powerful enough to demonstrate the potential of what they were researching. But before they could stabilize it fully, they were attacked."

"By the Purity Front," Elias said quietly, his emotions churning with a mixture of anger and shame that I could feel as clearly as my own.

"By its predecessor, yes," Professor Blackwood confirmed. "The attack separated them physically, which, as you three now know, can be extremely dangerous for those sharing a magical bond."

Caden winced, no doubt remembering how close I'd come to magical burnout when I'd stormed away from Elias. "Did they survive?"

"Lydia and Sorrel did," Professor Blackwood said, her voice softening. "The dryad Thorne sacrificed himself to create an escape for them, channeling all the power of their partial bond into a shield that allowed the others to flee."

I felt Elias's grief hit me like a physical blow, though it wasn't for someone he'd ever known. It was for the truth that had been hidden from him, for the history erased from his family's records.

"And afterward?" Elias asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Lydia returned to her family, eventually marrying the man who would become your grandfather," Professor Blackwood explained gently. "But according to this journal, she never abandoned her research. She continued in secret, preparing for a time when the work could be completed."

"By us," I said, the realization dawning suddenly. "She knew this would happen again."

Professor Blackwood nodded slowly. "I believe she hoped it would. That's why she left her journal and artifacts for you to find, Elias."

"But why now?" Caden asked. "Why us specifically?"

"The stars," Elias muttered, flipping through his grandmother's journal to a page marked with celestial charts. "There's a convergence happening this year. The same alignment that occurred when they attempted their bond."

Professor Blackwood looked impressed. "You've been studying her work more carefully than I realized, Mr. Thorne."

"I've been trying to understand," Elias admitted, a faint blush coloring his cheeks. "Some nights I can almost hear her voice when I read her words."

"Wait!" I shouted, surprising even myself. "A celestial alignment? You've got to be fucking kidding me!"

Everyone in the room turned to stare at me, clearly waiting for an explanation for my outburst.

"Fucking Sage!" I said, turning to Caden. "My parents' advisor, remember?"

"You've mentioned her before," he said, his brows furrowed.

"That old bitch has been making weird predictions since I was a kid," I continued. "I've always just brushed them off. But this year, before I came back to school, she said something odd." I leaned back in my chair, looking up at the ceiling as I tried to recall her words. "*This year, you'll find what you've been searching for. Your place in this world. When the stars align, you'll find yourself as part of something larger. Three hearts, one storm, and a power that will change the world.*" I turned

my gaze back down, finding them all staring once more. “Do you think she actually knew what was going to happen?”

Elias’s eyes widened. “That’s... unusually specific for a prophecy.”

“Sage isn’t just any advisor,” I explained, running a hand through my hair. “She’s ancient, like older-than-dirt ancient. Some say she was around when the realms first separated.”

Professor Blackwood set down Lydia’s journal with careful hands. “The fae are known for their prophetic abilities, especially the elder ones. If this Sage made such a prediction, we should take it seriously.”

Caden leaned forward, his blue eyes intense. “Three hearts, one storm... that has to be us. The triune bond.”

“But what about the power that will change the world part?” I asked, feeling uncomfortable with the weight of destiny suddenly pressing down on my shoulders. “I didn’t sign up to be some magical messiah. I just want to graduate and get the hell away from my parents’ expectations.”

Through our bond, I felt Elias’s agreement pulse strongly, though outwardly he maintained his composure. Only the slight tightening of his jaw betrayed his discomfort.

“Perhaps that’s precisely why the three of you were chosen,” Professor Blackwood said thoughtfully. “None of you fit neatly into the boxes others have created for you.”

“But you gave us the pendants,” I retorted. “Are you in on this bullshit?”

Professor Blackwood sighed. “I wish I could claim to be that powerful, but this was purely a coincidence.” She paused for a moment. “Or destiny, I suppose. I’ve been applying for use of the Resonance Stones from the Elder Council for years. This was the first time my application was approved and only because they thought you three were good candidates.”

“So, what now?” Elias asked, his fingers absently tracing the outline of his pendant beneath his shirt. “The Purity Front is still out there, and if they know about this bond—”

“They’ll come for us again,” Caden finished grimly.

Professor Blackwood stood, moving to a cabinet behind her desk. “Now, we prepare. The bond you three share is still developing, still unstable. What you did in the courtyard was powerful, but dangerous.” She withdrew a large spellbook with spell crafting materials tucked between the pages. “In order to control the power, you must *practice*.”

I couldn’t help but grin at the prospect. “Now you’re talking my language. I’ve been dying to see what else we can do together. I hate the theoretical stuff, anyway.”

Elias shifted uncomfortably in his chair, and I felt his familiar mixture of excitement and terror pulse through our connection. “What kind of practice are we talking about exactly?”

Professor Blackwood opened the spellbook, revealing pages covered in intricate diagrams and symbols that seemed to shift and move when I looked at them directly. “Synchronized casting. Learning to blend your individual magical signatures into something cohesive rather than simply overwhelming.”

“Like what we did during the attack, but controlled,” Caden said, understanding dawning in his voice.

“Precisely. What you accomplished that night was raw instinct and desperation. Powerful, yes, but completely uncontrolled. You could have killed yourselves.” Professor Blackwood’s tone was stern. “If you’re going to survive what’s coming, you need to master this bond properly.”

I leaned forward to get a better look at the diagrams, accidentally brushing against Elias’s shoulder. The contact sent a familiar jolt of electricity through both of us once more, and I noticed his breath catch slightly.

“Sorry,” I murmured, but I didn’t pull away immediately. Neither did he.

Professor Blackwood cleared her throat pointedly. “Which brings me to another matter we need to discuss. The physical component of your bond.”

“Physical component?” Elias’s voice pitched higher, and his face flushed that delicious shade of pink I was becoming addicted to.

“Triune bonds aren’t just magical, gentlemen. They’re emotional and physical as well.” Professor Blackwood’s expression remained professionally neutral, but I caught a hint of amusement in her eyes. “The attraction you’re all feeling toward each other isn’t a side effect. It’s an integral part of the connection.”

Caden groaned, burying his face in his hands. “Atlas is going to love hearing about this.”

“Actually,” Professor Blackwood continued, “Mr. Faolan’s inclusion in your... dynamic... may be beneficial. Werewolf pack bonds share some similarities with triune bonds. His presence could help stabilize the connection.”

I felt my eyebrows shoot up. “Are you seriously suggesting what I think you’re suggesting?”

“I’m suggesting that fighting the natural progression of your bond could be more dangerous than embracing it,” she replied calmly. “Sexual energy is one of the most powerful forces in magic. Channeled properly, it could strengthen your connection exponentially.”

The silence that followed was deafening. I could feel Elias’s mortification radiating through our bond so strongly it was making my own cheeks burn. Caden looked like he wanted to disappear into the floor.

“So let me get this straight,” I said, because someone had to break the tension. “You’re telling us that to save the world, we actually *need* to have a magical foursome?”

“That’s a crude oversimplification,” the professor said, her lips curling into a slight grin. “But accurate.”
“Oh my god…” Caden sighed.
Elias just groaned.
But I couldn’t help smiling. “Fuck *yes*.”

CHAPTER 11

ELIAS

I'd been poring over my grandmother's journal for the past hour, but I hadn't managed to read a single word yet. My mind was elsewhere.

Wild was sprawled across his bed, supposedly working on his Diplomatic Relations homework, but I could feel his restless energy through our bond like a constant hum of electricity. Every few minutes, his gaze would drift over to where I sat at my makeshift desk, and each time, a spike of want would pulse through our connection that made my concentration fracture completely.

Caden had escaped to the roof with Atlas again, claiming they needed to "discuss the bond situation privately." I suspected it was more about finding somewhere they could make out without an audience, but I couldn't blame them. The sexual tension in our small dorm room had become suffocating.

Professor Blackwood's words kept echoing in my head. *Sexual energy is one of the most powerful forces in magic. Channeled properly, it could strengthen your connection exponentially.*

I slammed the journal shut with more force than necessary, earning a questioning look from Wild.

"Problem with grandma's magical secrets?" he asked, his voice carrying that familiar teasing lilt that sent heat curling through my stomach.

"I can't focus," I admitted, setting the journal aside and turning to face him properly. I did everything I could to ignore the very obvious halfie I was sporting in my pants. "Not with you broadcasting every inappropriate thought that crosses your mind."

Wild's grin turned predatory. "Inappropriate? I haven't even gotten to the really good stuff yet."

Before I could formulate a response, a wave of very explicit imagery flooded through our connection, Wild's hands on my skin, his mouth trailing fire down my chest, the two of us tangled together in ways that made my breath catch.

"Stop that," I gasped, my body responding despite my protests.

"I'm not doing it on purpose," Wild said, though his eyes glittered with mischief. "The bond's getting stronger. I can't help what you're picking up."

He was right, and we both knew it. The magical connection between us had been intensifying daily, making it increasingly difficult to maintain any semblance of privacy. Our emotions, desires, even our dreams were bleeding together in ways that left me feeling exposed and vulnerable.

"This is impossible," I muttered, pressing the heels of my palms against my eyes. "How are we supposed to function like this?"

I heard the bed dip as Wild moved closer, his presence suddenly overwhelming. When I looked up, he was kneeling on the floor beside my chair, close enough that I could see the flecks of gold in his green eyes.

"Maybe we're not supposed to fight it anymore," he said softly, his hand coming to rest on my knee.

The touch sent electricity shooting through me, and I saw his pupils dilate in response to whatever he was feeling through our connection.

"Wild..." I warned, but my voice came out breathless rather than stern.

"I know you feel it too," he continued, his thumb tracing small circles against my knee. "Every time we touch, every time our magic syncs up. It's not just the bond, Elias. There's something real here."

I wanted to deny it, to retreat behind the walls of propriety and control that had protected me my entire life. But his touch was making it impossible to think clearly, and the honesty in his voice was stripping away my defenses one by one.

"It doesn't matter what I feel," I whispered, though even as I said it, I knew it was a lie. "My family, my reputation—"

"Fuck your family," Wild said fiercely, his hand sliding up to cup my face. "They want to use you as a weapon against people like me, like Caden. They tried to have us killed, Elias. When are you going to stop caring what they think?"

The truth of his words hit me like a physical blow. Through our bond, I felt his frustration, his longing, and underneath it

all, something deeper. Something that looked dangerously like love.

"I'm scared," I admitted, the words tumbling out before I could stop them. "I've never... I don't know how to do this."

Wild's expression softened, his thumb brushing across my cheekbone. "Do what?"

"Any of it. The bond, the magic, this..." I gestured helplessly between us. "You. I've never wanted anyone the way I want you, and it terrifies me."

For a moment, Wild went completely still, his emotions cycling through surprise, wonder, and something fierce and possessive that made my heart race.

"Elias," he breathed, and then he was leaning forward, his lips hovering just inches from mine. "Can I kiss you? Really kiss you this time, not to save anyone's life or prove a point. Just because I want to."

I should have said no. Should have pulled away and rebuilt my walls and pretended this wasn't happening. Instead, I found myself nodding, my eyes fluttering closed as he closed the distance between us.

This kiss was nothing like the desperate, magical ones we'd shared before. This was soft, tentative, Wild giving me every opportunity to pull away. When I didn't, when I instead leaned into him with a quiet sigh, he deepened it slowly, his tongue tracing the seam of my lips until I opened for him.

The bond flared between us, but instead of the overwhelming surge of power we'd experienced before, this felt like coming home. Our magic wound together in lazy spirals, content to simply exist in harmony rather than seeking to overwhelm or consume.

When we finally broke apart, I was breathing hard, my hands somehow tangled in his hair without my conscious permission.

"S-Sorry," I stammered, pulling my hands away.

But Wild grabbed them, pulling them around his neck and leaning close. "Don't be. I like it."

We stayed like that for a long moment, foreheads pressed together, sharing breath and the steady pulse of magic between us. I could feel his restraint through the bond, the way he was holding himself back despite the obvious desire radiating from him.

"Do you feel this way with everyone?" I managed to ask. "Like at your orgy… things. Is it the same?"

He shook his head slowly, those green eyes lifting to meet mine. "Those things are just fun, a way to let go and get lost in the sensations. I love them, don't get me wrong. And I meet a lot of interesting people there that I like." He took a deep breath. "But they're not you, Elias. You're… *special*."

His words landed like a stone in still water, ripples of emotion spreading through our connection. I felt his sincerity, the raw vulnerability beneath his usual carefree façade.

"How?" I whispered, my voice barely audible. "How can I be special to you? I'm everything you claim to hate. I'm structured, controlled, and *boring*."

Wild laughed softly, his thumb tracing the line of my jaw. "You're not boring, Elias. You're like... a volcano disguised as a mountain. All that power and passion just waiting to erupt beneath this perfect, pristine exterior." His eyes darkened. "And when you let go, even a little bit, it's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

I swallowed hard, unable to look away from the intensity in his gaze. Through our bond, I could feel the truth of his words, the genuine awe he felt whenever my carefully constructed walls slipped.

"I don't know how to be what you want," I admitted.

"I don't want you to be anything except yourself," he replied, rising from his knees to perch on the edge of my bed. "The real you, not the version your parents programmed."

His proximity was intoxicating, the scent of him, wildflowers and summer rain, filling my senses. I found myself leaning closer without conscious thought.

"And what if the real me is still too structured for you?" I asked.

Wild's smile turned wicked. "Then I'll just have to keep finding ways to make you lose control."

Before I could respond, he was kissing me again, deeper this time, his hands sliding into my hair to tilt my head back. A sound escaped me, something between a gasp and a moan, and I felt his satisfaction pulse through our bond.

"That's it," he murmured against my lips. "Let me hear you."

My hands found his waist, fingers digging into the warm skin beneath his shirt. The contact sent another surge of magic between us, our pendants warming against our chests.

"Wild," I gasped as his mouth trailed down my neck. "The door… Caden could—"

"Let him," Wild replied, his voice almost a growl. "I don't care."

His teeth grazed my collarbone, and I felt my resistance crumbling. Every touch sent waves of pleasure through our bond, amplified and reflected back between us in an intoxicating feedback loop. My hands slipped under his shirt, exploring the lean muscle beneath, marveling at how soft his skin felt against my fingertips.

"You've thought about this," Wild murmured against my throat, his voice rough with desire. "I've felt it. Every time you're in the shower, every night when you think I'm asleep."

Heat flooded my face, and my cock began to thicken in my jeans. "That… That's private."

He pulled back just enough to meet my eyes, his pupils blown wide with arousal. “Nothing’s private anymore, Elias. Not between us.” His fingers traced the outline of my pendant through my shirt. “This connects us in ways neither of us fully understands yet.”

“It’s invasive,” I whispered, though my body was betraying my words, leaning into his touch like a flower seeking sunlight.

“It’s intimate,” he corrected, his thumb brushing across my bottom lip. “And scary as hell, I know. But also, kind of amazing, don’t you think? To be known, completely, without hiding?”

The thought terrified me. I’d spent my entire life hiding, constructing layers of protection around my true self, building walls so high and thick that sometimes I forgot what lay beneath them. The idea of someone seeing past all that, of Wild seeing me, all of me, was more frightening than any magical attack.

But also... liberating.

“I don’t know if I can,” I admitted, my voice barely audible. “I don’t know if I know how to just... be.”

Wild’s expression softened, and through our bond, I felt a surge of tenderness that made my breath catch. “Then let me help you figure it out.”

He stood, pulling me up with him, our bodies pressed close in the small space between the bed and desk. His hands framed my face, thumbs stroking my cheekbones with surprising gentleness.

“We don’t have to do anything you’re not ready for,” he said, sincerity radiating through our connection. “But maybe... maybe we could try something? Just to see how it feels when we both stop fighting this?”

I swallowed hard, torn between desire and fear. “What did you have in mind?”

Instead of answering, Wild took my hand and guided me toward his bed. He sat down first, then tugged me gently until I was seated beside him, our thighs touching.

“Close your eyes,” he instructed softly.

“Why?”

A hint of his usual mischief flickered through our bond. “Because you think too much. Just trust me for once, okay?”

After a moment’s hesitation, I complied, letting my eyelids fall shut. Immediately, my other senses heightened. The sound of Wild’s breathing, the warmth of his body beside mine, the faint scent of wildflowers that always seemed to cling to his skin.

“Don’t think,” Wild murmured, his voice close to my ear. “Just feel.”

His fingers brushed against my pendant, sending a warm pulse through my chest. I felt his magic reach for mine, not forcefully, but with gentle invitation. After a moment’s hesitation, I allowed my own power to respond, reaching back tentatively.

The connection was different this time, not the overwhelming surge we’d experienced during battle or the desperate rush when I’d saved him from burnout. This was slower, more deliberate, like two streams merging into a river.

“That’s it,” Wild encouraged, his hand finding mine, fingers intertwining. “You’re doing great.”

I could feel his presence in my mind growing stronger, but instead of the usual chaotic jumble of thoughts and desires, there was a focused intent. He was deliberately sharing a memory with me.

Suddenly I was in a sunlit clearing, surrounded by ancient trees whose branches formed a cathedral-like canopy overhead. I could feel soft moss beneath my bare feet, hear birdsong and the distant sound of running water. The air tasted of honey and summer berries.

“Where is this?” I whispered, though I knew I hadn’t spoken aloud.

“My favorite place in the fae realm,” Wild’s voice answered within the shared memory. “The Heart Grove. It’s where I go when I need to just... be.”

I felt his emotions associated with this place, peace, freedom, a sense of belonging that he rarely experienced elsewhere. There was no pressure here, no expectations, just Wild in his purest form.

“It’s beautiful,” I said, meaning it.

The scene shifted slightly, and suddenly I was seeing myself through Wild’s eyes, not as I thought I appeared, but as he saw me. Strong, powerful, filled with untapped potential. Beautiful in ways I’d never considered myself to be.

My breath caught at the depth of emotion attached to these images. Admiration, desire, frustration at my self-imposed limitations, and underneath it all, that same dangerous feeling I’d sensed earlier. Something tender and fierce and protective.

“Wild,” I gasped, overwhelmed.

The memory faded suddenly as a loud knock echoed through the room. Although at that moment, it felt like it was from another world. Wild was already on his feet and heading for the door as I tried to shake myself out of the vision. It was like waking up from a dream, unsure of whether I was awake or still sleeping.

“Caden?” Wild asked as he pulled the door open. “Why didn’t you just come in?”

“It… It felt like you two might be…” he said quietly, his voice timid and shy.

“We weren’t,” Wild replied.

He paused for a moment, looking Caden up and down. And that’s when I felt it too, a sense of panic coming from Caden that I’d been too caught up to notice.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, standing up from the bed. “What happened?”

Caden held out a small piece of paper, the upper edge torn from where it had been pulled down from a bulletin board. “This was just posted magically all over the school.” He handed it to Wild, whose eyes went wide. “There was another attack. They’re putting us on lockdown.”

CHAPTER 12

ELIAS

"I can't believe this," Wild sighed, confusion and no small amount of panic washing over him. "I mean… can they do that? Force us all to stay here? We're adults, after all. And I don't want to be in a cage." He looked up at Caden. "I fucking *hate* cages."

Caden's expression softened as he stepped into the room, Atlas following close behind. The werewolf's usual relaxed demeanor was replaced by something tense and alert, his nostrils flaring as he scented the air.

"The Dean's authority is pretty absolute in emergency situations," Atlas said grimly, closing the door behind them. "Especially when the Elder Council backs the decision. Even my family's secret portal has been shut down."

Through our bond, I felt Wild's claustrophobia spike, his fae nature recoiling at the thought of being trapped. His emotions crashed into mine, making my own chest tighten with sympathetic panic.

"What kind of attack?" I asked, taking the notice from Wild's trembling hands. The parchment was warm to the touch, still humming with the magical energy that had distributed it throughout the academy.

"Three more schools," Caden said quietly, settling onto his bed. "Thornwick Institute in Scotland, Académie Starlight in Paris, and..." He paused, his face pale. "Moonhaven College in Oregon, the sister college to Widdershins."

Wild began pacing the small room like a caged animal, his agitation bleeding through our connection so strongly I had to grip the edge of my desk to remain steady. "How many casualties?"

"Seventeen dead," Atlas answered, his voice heavy. "Dozens more injured. All students or faculty with mixed heritage or unconventional magical abilities."

The paper crumpled in my hands as fury surged through me. "They're escalating. The Purity Front isn't just targeting individuals anymore, they're going after entire institutions."

"Because of us," Wild said suddenly, stopping mid-pace to stare at me. "Because of what we did in the courtyard. We proved that bonds like ours are possible, and now they're trying to eliminate anyone who might form one."

The guilt hit me like a physical blow. This was all my family's fault… all *my* fault. If I had only paid more attention… known that they were doing shady things, I might've been able to stop them.

Through our connection, I felt Wild and Caden's immediate rejection of that thought, their emotional support wrapping around me even as my own self-recrimination threatened to overwhelm me.

"This isn't your fault," Caden said firmly. "They were planning this long before we bonded. If you'd stayed behind or tried to stop them, they would've destroyed you."

"They might still destroy us," I muttered, running a hand through my hair. "Now we're trapped like fish in a barrel. Perfect targets."

Atlas moved closer to Caden, his protective instincts flaring. "The academy's defenses are stronger than you think. Professor Blackwood and the other faculty have been working around the clock to reinforce the wards since your attack."

"But for how long?" Wild demanded, his voice rising with each word. "What happens when the Purity Front decides to lay siege? When they bring enough firepower to crack even Widdershins' protections?" He whirled to face me, his green eyes blazing. "Your father's people have resources, Elias. Money, influence, magical artifacts. How long before they overwhelm us?"

I opened my mouth to respond, but a sharp knock at the door cut me off. All four of us froze, exchanging glances.

"Students," came Professor Blackwood's crisp voice from the hallway. "I need to speak with you immediately."

Atlas opened the door to reveal not just our professor, but Dean Thornfield himself, his usually pristine robes wrinkled and his dark hair disheveled. Behind them stood two figures I didn't recognize, a tall woman with intricate braids and a shorter man whose eyes held an otherworldly gleam.

"Representatives from the Elder Council," Dean Thornfield announced without preamble as they filed into our suddenly cramped room. "They're here specifically to discuss your... situation."

The woman stepped forward, her gaze sweeping over each of us with calculating intensity. “I am Councilor Vael. This is Councilor Ashwick. We’ve come because your triune bond represents both our greatest hope and our most dangerous vulnerability.”

Wild’s panic spiked again through our connection. “Meaning what, exactly?”

“Meaning,” Councilor Ashwick said, his voice carrying an odd harmonic quality that marked him as fae, “that the Purity Front will stop at nothing to either capture or kill you three. Your bond threatens everything they believe about magical hierarchy.”

“But it also proves that the old ways can be restored,” Councilor Vael added, her expression softening slightly. “That the barriers between our peoples are artificial constructs that can be overcome.”

Professor Blackwood moved to stand beside us, a gesture of protection that didn’t go unnoticed. “What are you proposing?”

“Relocation,” Dean Thornfield said heavily. “A safe house, heavily warded, where the boys can complete their bond training without putting the entire academy at risk.”

“Absolutely not,” Wild said immediately, his voice flat with finality. “I’m not going into hiding like some kind of criminal.”

“It’s not about hiding,” Councilor Vael insisted. “It’s about survival. And preparation. If you’re going to face what’s coming, you need to be stronger than you are now.”

Through our bond, I felt Caden’s quiet terror at the thought of leaving Atlas, and Wild’s growing desperation at the walls closing in around him.

My own emotions were a churning mess of guilt, fear, and a strange sense of responsibility I didn’t fully understand.

“What exactly is coming?” I asked, dreading the answer but needing to know.

Councilor Ashwick exchanged a look with his companion before speaking. “Intelligence suggests the Purity Front is planning something they call the Final Cleansing. A coordinated strike against every major magical institution that teaches or harbors mixed heritage students.”

“They’re building toward war,” Dean Thornfield added grimly. “And they see your bond as the catalyst that will rally others to their cause or against it.”

Wild’s agitation reached a fever pitch, his magic crackling visibly around his fingertips. “So what, we just disappear? Let them terrorize everyone else while we hide away playing magical training montage?”

“The safe house isn’t just for hiding,” Professor Blackwood interjected. “It’s where Lydia conducted her original research. Her notes, her artifacts, everything she discovered about triune bonds is there.”

That got my attention. “My grandmother’s research facility still exists?”

“Hidden,” Councilor Vael confirmed. “Protected by wards she and your great-uncle Sorrel wove together before their bond was broken.”

I turned to Blackwood. “You knew about this, and you didn’t tell me?!”

“She did not,” Councilor Vael interrupted. “The Elder Council was aware, but the information was kept secret. We… *hoped* that things would never escalate to this level of violence, that we could quell the Purity Front before it got out of hand.” She let out a long sigh. “Unfortunately, that wasn’t the case.”

“Where is it?”

“Hidden between the realms,” she said. “It’s the one place the Purity Front can’t reach you.”

I felt something shift in Wild’s emotions, curiosity beginning to temper his panic. “Between realms? Like, actually between the fae realm and the mortal world?”

“A pocket dimension anchored to both but belonging to neither,” Councilor Ashwick explained with obvious pride. “One of the last remnants of the time before the Great Separation.”

Caden looked up at Atlas with desperate eyes. “How long would we be gone?”

“That depends on how quickly you master the bond,” Dean Thornfield said carefully. “And how long the academy can hold out against whatever the Purity Front is planning.”

The implication hung heavy in the air. We might not have an academy to return to.

Through our connection, I felt Wild’s internal war between his need for freedom and his growing understanding that this might be our only chance to become strong enough to actually fight back. Caden’s emotions were simpler but no less painful, the agony of being separated from his mate warring with his loyalty to us.

“There’s something else,” Professor Blackwood said quietly. “The safe house... it’s not just where Lydia did her research. It’s where she, Sorrel, and Thorne lived. Together. For nearly three years before the attack that separated them.”

“You mean they were actually bonded?” Wild’s voice was barely a whisper. “A witch and a fae?”

“More than bonded,” Councilor Vael said softly. “According to the records, they were married in the old way. A joining of magic, soul, and body that transcended the boundaries between realms.”

I felt my heart skip a beat. “But she married my grandfather.”

“She did,” Professor Blackwood nodded. “And had children with him. But Sorrel remained her true bond throughout her

life. It's possible that they continued to meet in secret, although we have no way to prove that."

"I… I never knew."

"Nobody did," Councilor Ashwick said. "They did an excellent job of keeping their relationship secret. It wasn't until Lydia died that Sorrel turned over everything to us before he returned to Briar Hall and passed away himself."

"Speaking of Briar Hall," Councilor Vael said, pulling a crystal sphere from her robes. "I have a message for you, Mr. Briar Hall. It's from your parents." She handed the scroll to him, a surprised look in his eyes. "They recorded this and asked me to give it to you."

Wild stared at the crystal sphere as if it might explode in his hands. Through our bond, I felt his emotions cycle rapidly between confusion, dread, and bitter amusement.

"Let me guess," he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "They want their disappointing son to come home immediately and stop embarrassing the family name?"

Councilor Vael's expression remained neutral. "Perhaps you should listen to the message before making assumptions."

Wild activated the sphere with a pulse of his magic, and suddenly the room filled with the ethereal voices of his parents. Even through the magical recording, their fae nature was unmistakable, their words carrying harmonics that made the air itself seem to shimmer.

"Wilderain," his mother's voice began, formal and distant, "we have received word of recent events at your academy. While we cannot condone your... associations... we understand that circumstances have placed you in grave danger."

His father's voice joined in, equally cold. "The Purity Front's reach extends even into the Seelie Court. There are those among our own people who support their cause, who believe that separation is preferable to the chaos of integration."

I felt Wild's shock ripple through our connection. He'd known his parents disapproved of his choices, but he hadn't realized the depth of political division within the fae realm itself.

"However," his mother continued, "you are still our son, and we will not see you murdered by fanatics. We have spoken with the Elder Council and given our blessing for you to access the sanctuary. Use this time wisely, Wilderain. Learn to control the power you've awakened, and perhaps... perhaps some good can come from this unfortunate situation."

The message ended abruptly, leaving an uncomfortable silence in its wake. Wild crushed the now-empty sphere in his fist, magical crystal dust trickling between his fingers.

"Well," he said with forced lightness, "that was about as warm and fuzzy as I expected."

But through our bond, I could feel the complex mix of emotions churning beneath his flippant exterior. Relief that his parents weren't completely cutting him off, hurt at their continued disapproval, and a deep, aching loneliness that he'd been carrying for years.

Without thinking, I reached out and took his hand, squeezing gently. He looked up at me in surprise, but didn't pull away.

"So," Caden said quietly, breaking the tension, "it sounds like we don't really have a choice. If even the fae realm isn't safe..."

Atlas moved to sit beside him on the bed, pulling Caden against his side. "I could come with you," he offered desperately. "My pack bonds might help stabilize your connection, and—"

"No," Dean Thornfield interrupted firmly. "The sanctuary can only be accessed by those who are part of the triune bond. Mr. Faolan, as much as we appreciate your dedication to Mr. Cromwell, you would not be permitted to leave the academy grounds."

"Atlas *is* part of the bond," Caden said as he stepped in front of Atlas, facing Dean Thornfield head on.

The Dean shook his head. "I'm sorry?"

Caden glanced at the councilors for a moment before taking a deep breath. "Atlas is my mate. We have already formed the bond."

"We assumed that," the Dean replied. "But that doesn't mean—"

"And I've made him my familiar."

The whole room went silent.

"His magic is part of me, so when the bond extended to Wild and Elias—"

"Mr. Faolan's did as well…" Professor Blackwood finished, a look of shock and surprise filling her features. "By the gods… a… a tetrad."

"A what?" I asked, feeling the color drain from my face.

Professor Blackwood moved quickly to a nearby chair, practically collapsing into it. "A tetrad. It's... it's almost mythological. A four-way magical binding."

Wild whistled low. "That's why Atlas felt our connection that night. Why he got... affected when we did."

"And why I could sense when Wild was in danger," Atlas added, his golden eyes wide with realization. "I thought it was just because of Caden, but I felt it directly."

Dean Thornfield looked like he might faint. "This changes everything. The texts about triunes are rare enough, but tetrads? There might be nothing in the existing magical literature."

“There is,” Councilor Vael said quietly, her calculating eyes now fixed on Atlas with newfound interest. “Not in the public archives, but in the sealed section of the Elder Council’s library. Accounts of bonds between four magical beings, each representing a fundamental element of magic.”

“Structure, chaos, growth, and...” Councilor Ashwick paused, studying Atlas intently.

“Protection,” I finished, the word rising from somewhere deep inside me. “That’s what Atlas represents in the bond.”

Wild nodded slowly, his fingers still entwined with mine. “It makes sense. When we were attacked, I felt something from Atlas, even though we weren’t physically connected. Like a shield around all of us.”

“This complicates matters,” Dean Thornfield muttered, pacing the small room.

“On the contrary,” Councilor Vael said, a hint of excitement creeping into her voice. “It strengthens our position considerably. A tetrad bond, if fully realized, would be exponentially more powerful than a triune.”

Wild’s grip on my hand tightened. “So Atlas gets to come with us to this magical hideaway?”

“He must,” Professor Blackwood said firmly. “Separating any part of a forming tetrad could be catastrophic for all involved.”

Relief flooded through our connection, not just from Caden but from Atlas as well. I realized with a start that I could feel him now, his steady, protective presence like a warm weight at the edge of my consciousness. How had I not noticed before?

“So, what now?” I asked, trying to regain some sense of control over the situation. “When do we leave?”

“Tonight,” Dean Thornfield said grimly. “The Purity Front’s attacks are escalating. We can’t risk waiting.”

“Tonight?” Wild’s panic surged again. “Just like that? We don’t even get to say goodbye to anyone?”

“There’s no time,” Councilor Ashwick insisted. “Our intelligence suggests they may already be planning their next target. Widdershins could be next.”

“Pack your bags, boys,” Councilor Vael said. “We leave within the hour.”

CHAPTER 13

WILD

Stepping between the realms was a little like walking through a cold waterfall. But instead of stepping through to the other side, I felt like I was still trapped in that thin sheet of cold that refused to let go of me. For a moment I thought I'd drown, but when I opened my eyes, I found myself in a strange grey void. The cold shifted to my feet, and I realized I was standing in moving water up to my knees, the current drawing me toward some far-off horizon that I couldn't make out. For some strange reason, I had a bad feeling about it.

"Don't follow the water," Councilor Vael said, as if reading my thoughts. "The current will take you to the gate of life and death. If you walk through… there's no coming back."

"And we wary of dead spirits trying to get back to the realm of the living," Councilor Ashwick added. "They like to cling to warm bodies that spend too long in the stream."

"Are you telling me this is the Veil?" I asked, my fae curiosity getting the better of me. "I always thought it was a sheet or something."

"This is the Veil," Councilor Ashwick nodded. "It exists between all realms. Water is the best conductor for spiritual energy, and it traps the dead to carry them away from the realm of the living when their time comes."

"This is all very interesting," Elias said, his teeth already chattering. "But can we get the hell out of here, please? It's freezing and honestly, it gives me the creeps."

"Of course," Councilor Vael said, pointing her staff ahead. "Follow me. The mansion is this way."

I reached over, taking Elias's hand instinctively. "Don't worry," I said, giving it a squeeze. "I'll keep you warm."

The contact sent a wave of heat through both of us, our bond flaring to life even in this strange between-space. Elias's shivers subsided slightly, though his grip on my hand remained tight.

"How far?" Atlas asked, his werewolf senses clearly on high alert as he scanned the grey expanse around us. His protective instincts were radiating through our tetrad bond so strongly I could taste his unease.

"Not far," Councilor Vael replied, though her voice seemed to echo strangely in the void. "Time moves differently here. What feels like miles could be mere steps."

As we began to move through the knee-deep water, following the councilor's lead, I noticed shapes moving beneath the surface. Pale, reaching hands that grasped at our legs as we passed, faces that appeared and dissolved like smoke in the current.

"Ignore them," Councilor Ashwick warned as Caden stumbled, nearly pulled off balance by something tugging at his ankle. "They cannot truly harm you, but they will try to convince you otherwise."

Atlas immediately moved closer to Caden, his arm wrapping protectively around his mate's waist. The gesture sent a pulse of warmth through all of us via the bond, pushing back some of the oppressive cold.

"There," Councilor Vael said suddenly, pointing ahead with her staff.

Through the grey mist, I could make out a structure materializing as if it were being painted into existence stroke by stroke. It was magnificent and impossible, a sprawling mansion that seemed to combine architectural elements from every magical realm. Fae spires twisted alongside witch towers, while dryad-grown living walls wound between stone foundations that hummed with werewolf pack magic.

"Welcome," Councilor Ashwick said with obvious pride, "to Lydia's sanctuary."

The mansion grew larger as we approached, defying all logic of perspective. What had seemed like a modest estate from a distance revealed itself to be vast, with wings and levels that seemed to fold in on themselves in ways that made my fae-trained eyes water.

"How is this possible?" Elias breathed, his academic curiosity overriding his discomfort.

"Your grandmother was more powerful than anyone realized," Councilor Vael explained as we reached what appeared to be a shoreline, the grey water lapping at stones that shifted between obsidian and pearl with each wave. "This place exists in a

pocket of reality she carved out herself, anchored to all realms but belonging to none."

We climbed from the water onto solid ground, and immediately I felt the oppressive weight of the Veil lift from my shoulders. The air was suddenly warm and sweet, carrying scents of wildflowers and old magic. When I turned around to look at the water, I found it was no longer gray and full of obscured shapes, but blue and crystalline, as if we were standing on the edge of the sea on a sunny day. The illusion surrounding the mansion was powerful, more so than anything I'd ever seen.

"The bond will be stronger here," Councilor Ashwick warned as we approached the mansion's front entrance, massive doors carved with symbols that seemed to move when I wasn't looking directly at them. "This place was designed to amplify magical connections. You may experience some... intensity as your tetrad stabilizes."

As if summoned by his words, I felt the bond between the four of us suddenly flare to life with unprecedented strength. Elias gasped beside me, his hand tightening in mine as waves of sensation crashed through our connection. I could feel Atlas's protective instincts, Caden's wonder at the magical architecture, and Elias's mixture of fear and fascination all as clearly as my own emotions.

"Holy shit," Atlas growled, steadying himself against the door frame. "That's... intense."

Caden looked flushed, his breathing slightly uneven. "I can feel all of you. Not just fragments or emotions, but... everything."

The doors swung open before we could knock, revealing a grand foyer that defied the laws of physics. Staircases spiraled upward and downward simultaneously, while the walls seemed to whisper to each other in languages I didn't recognize. Wall sconces cast dancing shadows that seemed to tell stories of their own.

"Welcome to your new home," Councilor Vael said, stepping aside to let us enter. "Everything you need is here. Lydia's research, her personal effects, training rooms designed specifically for bond work, and..."

She gestured to a side table where a crystal orb sat glowing softly. "A communication device. Should you need to contact us for any reason."

"You're leaving us here alone?" Elias asked, a note of panic creeping into his voice.

"This place will teach you what you need to know," Councilor Ashwick assured him. "Lydia designed it to respond to bonded individuals. It will guide your training."

I felt a chill that had nothing to do with the Veil we'd just crossed. "You're saying the house is alive?"

"Not alive, exactly," Councilor Vael smiled mysteriously. "But aware. Lydia poured decades of her consciousness into these walls. In a sense, she never truly left. There's a few ethereal servants wandering around as well, I'm sure."

As if responding to her words, the mansion around us hummed softly, a welcoming sound that vibrated through the bond and made all four of us relax slightly.

"There are bedrooms upstairs," Councilor Ashwick continued. "Though given the nature of your bond, you may find separate sleeping arrangements... challenging."

Heat flooded my cheeks as I caught his meaning. Through our connection, I felt similar embarrassment from the others, mixed with an undercurrent of anticipation that none of us wanted to acknowledge yet.

"We'll figure it out," Atlas said gruffly, his arm still protectively around Caden.

The councilors exchanged a look before Councilor Vael spoke again. "Before we leave you, there's something else you should know. The Purity Front has been searching for this place for decades. These wards are strong, but not impenetrable. They will eventually find a way in. It's only a matter of time."

"How long do we have?" Elias asked, his voice tight with worry.

"Months, hopefully," Councilor Vael replied, though her tone suggested she wasn't entirely confident. "The wards your grandmother and Sorrel wove are intricate, layered with protections from multiple realms. But the Purity Front has been growing stronger, acquiring artifacts and knowledge that could eventually breach even these defenses."

"So, we're on borrowed time," I said grimly. "Perfect."

"Use it wisely," Councilor Ashwick advised. "The mansion will help guide your bond development, but ultimately the work must come from you. Trust each other. Trust the connection between you."

With that cryptic and mostly unhelpful advice, both councilors began to fade at the edges, their forms becoming translucent. "We'll return when we can," Councilor Vael's voice echoed as they dissolved completely. "Remember, use the communication crystal if you need us urgently."

And then we were alone.

The silence that followed their departure was deafening, broken only by the gentle humming of the mansion around us. I looked at my three bondmates, suddenly feeling the weight of our situation settling over us like a heavy blanket. This was no longer just college and homework and classes. This was life and death and the fate of the supernatural world.

"Well," I said, attempting my usual lightness, though it came out somewhat strained. "This is cozy. Four guys, one magical house, and impending doom. What could go wrong?"

Atlas snorted despite himself. "When you put it like that, it sounds like the setup to a really bad joke."

"Or a really good porno," I added with a grin, earning myself a scandalized look from Elias and a laugh from Caden.

"Wild," Elias said, but there was less censure in his voice than usual. The bond between us was humming so strongly that I could feel his exhaustion, his worry, and underneath it all, a growing acceptance of our situation.

"Come on," Caden said, always the peacemaker. "Let's explore a bit before we collapse. I want to see what Lydia left for us."

As we moved deeper into the mansion, I couldn't shake the feeling that we were being watched. Not malevolently, but with a kind of gentle curiosity, as if the house itself was taking our measure. The walls seemed to pulse softly with each step we took, and I swore I could hear whispers just at the edge of perception.

"Do you feel that?" Atlas asked quietly, his werewolf senses obviously picking up on the same strange awareness I was detecting.

"The house is definitely... aware," Elias confirmed, one hand trailing along the wall as we walked. "There's consciousness woven into the very foundation. It's remarkable."

We found ourselves in what appeared to be a library, though the world *library* seemed an inadequate word for the vast space that opened before us. Books floated freely between towering shelves that stretched impossibly high, organizing and reorganizing themselves according to some arcane system I could only guess at.

"This is incredible," Elias breathed, his eyes wide with wonder as he reached for a book that drifted lazily past his shoulder. The moment his fingers touched the leather binding, several other volumes flew from different shelves to hover around him in a perfect orbit. "It's responding to my thoughts!"

"Of course it is," I muttered, watching as the books circled Elias like eager pets. "Your grandma's house would naturally favor you. Nepotism at its finest."

Atlas moved cautiously through the space, his werewolf instincts clearly on high alert. "Something smells... old here. Powerful." He sniffed the air again. "But not threatening."

"It feels like her," Elias said softly, his expression distant as he absently stroked the spine of a particularly ancient-looking tome. "I was a baby when my grandmother died, but somehow... I recognize her energy."

Through our bond, I could feel the emotional weight of his words, a bittersweet longing for connection with a woman he'd never known but whose legacy now defined his life. It made something twist uncomfortably in my chest.

"Look at this," Caden called from across the room. He stood before an ornate writing desk where a single piece of parchment lay, glowing faintly in the ambient light. "I think it's for us."

We gathered around as Elias carefully lifted the parchment. The moment his fingers touched it, the glow intensified, and elegant script began to appear on the previously blank surface.

Welcome, children of the tetrad. Sorrel and I have long foreseen your arrival. Begin with my personal journals. They will help you understand what you've become and what you must learn. Time is precious. The bond must be stabilized before you can harness its true power.

"Well, that's not ominous at all," I quipped, though my voice lacked its usual confidence. "Nothing like a cryptic message from beyond the grave to really set the mood."

"It's not from beyond the grave," Elias said, his academic curiosity visibly overriding his exhaustion. "It's an echo spell, designed to activate when specific magical signatures entered this space."

"So, where are these journals?" Atlas asked, practical as always.

As if in response, a section of bookshelf slid aside, revealing a small alcove where five leather-bound journals were stacked neatly on a pedestal. Each was a different color: midnight blue, forest green, amber gold, and deep crimson, with a fifth volume in pure white at the top.

"Yeah," I said, glancing at the others. "That sounds cool and all, but I'm fucking exhausted. And hungry."

"Me too," Caden nodded.

Elias pulled his hand back, already reaching for the journals. "You're right. We should rest and start with fresh minds in the morning."

"Let's go find our rooms then," Atlas said, leading us out of the library. He reached over, wrapping his arm around Caden's waist. "There's some… *things* we've been neglecting."

"Atlas…" Caden said, a surge of desperate arousal spiking through our bond. "You don't have to be so *obvious* about it."

"Everyone can feel how horny we are," Atlas replied, clearly not ashamed. "And I can feel how hard up they are, too. We need to take care of that." He looked over at Elias and myself. "The foursome is still on the table if you want to join." He swept Caden off his feet and tossed him over his shoulder like a ragdoll. "Don't wait on us for dinner."

With that, the two of them disappeared up the grand staircase and down a long hallway. Elias and I were left standing at the bottom, our brains buzzing with all the things Atlas intended to do to Caden. I glanced to my left, seeing the flush of red across Elias's cheeks. Through our bond, I could feel how much he wanted to join them, that burning curiosity threatening to overthrow his hesitations.

"Come on," I said, grabbing him by the hand and pulling him toward the stairs as I tried to hide how tight my jeans were getting. "Let's go find our rooms."

CHAPTER 14

ELIAS

The pure arousal permeating through our bond made it difficult to even walk, much less think. By the time Wild and I had made it to the bedrooms on the top floor, I could already feel Atlas stripping off Caden's clothes in a room down the hall. Wild's grip tightened on my hand when a sudden surge of pleasure swept through us. In my mind's eye, I could feel Caden's lips wrapped around Atlas's thick werewolf cock. We'd barely stepped into a room and closed the door behind us before we nearly collapsed to the floor, moans escaping our lips.

"Oh… my gods…" Wild breathed, hot and heavy. "The bond is… so much stronger here…" He reached down, adjusting his very obvious excitement in his jeans. "I was able to kind of ignore it at the academy, but here?" He leaned his head back against the wall, closing his eyes. "I might cum just from this."

I didn't know what to say. I was so caught up in the sensations that I couldn't think. At the same time, the embarrassment coursing through my veins was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. The virgin side of me was scared to take the next step, to give into my desires. But as my eyes traced down Wild's body and eventually settled on the bulge in his jeans, I knew I couldn't resist any longer. After twenty-two years, it was just too much to bear anymore.

"Wild," I whispered, my voice rougher than I'd ever heard it. The sound of his name on my lips seemed to break something loose in both of us.

He opened those green eyes, pupils blown wide with desire, and the look he gave me was pure hunger. "Elias... I can't hold back anymore. Not with this bond, not in this place." His breathing was ragged as another wave from Atlas and Caden crashed over us. "Tell me you want this. Tell me you want me."

Instead of answering with words, I closed the distance between us, pressing him back against the wall and capturing his lips with mine. This kiss was nothing like our tentative explorations before. This was desperate, consuming, fueled by weeks of suppressed desire and the magical amplification of the sanctuary.

Wild's hands immediately found my shirt, tugging it over my head with fumbling urgency. The moment his palms made contact with my bare chest, electricity shot through our bond so intensely that we both cried out against each other's mouths.

"Fuck, Elias," he gasped, his fingers tracing the lines of my torso with reverent touches. "You're so fucking beautiful. I've wanted this for so goddamn long."

My own hands were working at his clothes, needing to feel the heat of his skin against mine. When I finally got his shirt off, I had to pause just to look at him. Wild was lean but perfectly sculpted, his pale skin marked with freckles that seemed to map constellations across his shoulders and chest.

"You're the beautiful one," I murmured, leaning down to press kisses along his collarbone. He tasted like summer rain and wild magic, intoxicating and addictive.

Through our bond, I could feel his surprise that an obvious virgin could be so bold, followed immediately by a surge of arousal so intense it made my knees weak. His hands tangled in my hair as I worked my way down his throat, finding that sensitive spot where his pulse hammered against my lips. I could feel his thoughts, each one of them guiding me to where he wanted me to touch most.

When I sucked gently at that spot, Wild's hips bucked against mine involuntarily, a broken moan escaping his lips. The sound sent fire straight through me, and I realized I was drunk on the power of making him unravel before my very eyes.

"Fuck, Elias," he panted, his voice strained. "Where did you learn to—" His words cut off in a sharp gasp as I nipped at one of his nipples, the sensation reverberating through our bond and back to me amplified.

"I'm learning from you," I admitted against his skin, my voice rough with want. "I can feel what you like through the bond."

His laugh was breathless and amazed. "That's... fuck, that's incredible." His hands moved to my belt, fingers working at the buckle with shaking hands. "Can you feel this too?"

The moment his palm pressed against my cock through my pants, I let out a deep moan. The dual sensation of his touch and his own arousal feeding back through our connection was overwhelming. I braced my hands against the wall on either side of

his head, trying to maintain some semblance of control.

"Wild," I groaned, my voice breaking on his name. "I don't... I've never..."

"I know," he whispered, his free hand cupping my face with surprising tenderness. "We'll go slow. I want to worship every inch of you."

Another surge of pleasure from down the hall hit us both, and I could feel Atlas's hands roaming over Caden's body, could sense the desperate need building between them. It was like being caught in a feedback loop of desire that threatened to consume us completely.

"The bed," Wild managed to gasp out between kisses. "Before I lose what's left of my mind."

I lifted him easily, his legs wrapping around my waist as I carried him the few steps to the ornate four-poster bed that dominated the room. When I laid him down on the midnight blue coverlet, he looked like some ethereal creature from a fairy tale, his ginger hair spread across the pillows and his green eyes glowing with fae light.

"You're staring," he said with a soft smile, though I could feel his eagerness through our bond.

"I can't help it," I replied honestly, my hands tracing the planes of his chest. "You're perfect."

Wild's breath hitched as I leaned down to kiss him again, this time slower, more deliberate. I wanted to memorize every sensation, every sound he made, every place that made him arch beneath me. Through our connection, I could feel his growing desperation, his need for more contact, more friction, more everything.

"Then touch me," he breathed against my lips, his hands guiding mine to the waistband of his jeans. "Please, Elias. I *need* to feel you."

My fingers trembled as I worked the button free, hyperaware of every breath, every flutter of his pulse beneath my touch. When I finally slid the denim down his hips, Wild lifted himself to help, and suddenly his cock sprang free, a glistening bead of pre-cum already forming at his tip.

He was gorgeous everywhere, lean and pale, with that same constellation of freckles scattered across his thighs. When my gaze settled on his cock, flushed and hard against his stomach, I felt my mouth go dry with need. He was thick and long, a vein throbbing on the topside of his shaft. I reached for him, then stopped.

"Can I..." I started, then stopped, heat flooding my cheeks.

Wild's eyes darkened with understanding. "You can touch me," he said. "Or do you want to *taste* me?"

I nodded, unable to form words, and Wild's answering groan sent another spike of arousal through our bond.

"Fuck yes," he whispered, one hand tangling gently in my hair. "But only if you want to. Don't feel like you have to—"

I silenced him by pressing my lips to his inner thigh, feeling him shudder beneath me. Through our connection, I could sense exactly what he craved, could feel the phantom sensation of what my mouth would feel like on him. It was like having the world's most intimate instruction manual written directly into my consciousness.

I started slow, my hand wrapped around his shaft. Each squeeze brought a small whimper of approval from his lips, telling me to go further. I experimented stroking him up and down, feeling the way he pulsed against my palm. The bead of pre-cum grew and dripped down his gorgeous cockhead. Finally, I could take it no longer. I pulled him close, my tongue reaching out.

When I finally took his thick cock into my mouth, Wild cried out so loudly I was certain Atlas and Caden could hear us down the hall. The taste of him was intoxicating, salt, natural musk, and a sweetness like honey that made my head spin. Every movement of my tongue sent waves of pleasure cascading through our bond, doubled and reflected back until I couldn't tell whose sensations were whose. Each movement made my pants even more painfully tight.

"Oh gods, Elias," Wild panted, his hips fighting to stay still as I explored him with growing confidence. "That's... fuck, you're incredible. How are you so good at this?"

I pulled back just enough to speak, my voice rough. "I can feel everything you feel. Every place you want me to touch, every way you want me to move." To demonstrate, I traced my tongue along the sensitive spot just beneath the head of his cock, exactly the way I could sense he craved.

Wild's back arched off the bed, a broken sob escaping his lips. Through our bond, I felt his pleasure so intensely it was almost overwhelming, but I also felt his growing need for something more.

"Elias," he gasped, tugging gently at my hair. "Come here. I want to touch you, too."

I reluctantly released him, crawling back up his body to capture his lips in another searing kiss. He could taste himself on my tongue, and the knowledge sent another surge of arousal through both of us.

His hands moved to my remaining clothes, stripping them away with practiced efficiency until I was lying there naked on the bed, my overexcited cock leaking pre-cum all over my belly.

Wild's eyes went wide as he took in the sight of me, his gaze traveling slowly from my face down to where my cock lay hard and aching against my stomach. Through our bond, I felt his appreciation, his hunger, and something deeper that made my heart race.

"Beautiful," he whispered, his hands skimming over my chest, my sides, learning the contours of my body with the same reverence I'd shown him. "Absolutely perfect."

When his fingers finally wrapped around my shaft, I couldn't hold back the moan that tore from my throat. The sensation

was unlike anything I'd ever experienced, not just his touch but feeling his satisfaction at my response through our connection.

"So responsive," he murmured, stroking me slowly, deliberately. "I like that."

Another wave of pleasure from Atlas and Caden crashed through us, and I could sense they were fucking now, Caden riding his werewolf mate with everything he had. They weren't far from climax. And the knowledge that our bondmates were lost in their own passion just down the hall only intensified everything between Wild and me.

"I want to taste you too," Wild said, his voice husky with desire. "But first..." He guided me down until we were lying on our sides, facing each other. "I want to try something."

His hand found mine, our fingers interlacing as he positioned us so our cocks were pressed together. When he wrapped both our lengths in his grip, the sensation was so intense I saw stars.

"Feel that," he breathed against my lips as he began to stroke us both. "Feel how perfect we fit together."

The friction was exquisite, made even more intense by the feedback loop of our shared pleasure. Every sensation was doubled, tripled through our bond until I was drowning in it. Wild's free hand cupped my face, keeping our foreheads pressed together as we moved against each other.

"I can feel everything you're feeling," I gasped, my hips rocking into his touch. "It's too much, it's intense, it's—"

"I know," he whispered, his own breathing ragged. "It's like we're sharing the same body, the same pleasure."

Through our connection, I could sense his building climax, could feel the coil of tension in his core that matched my own. The knowledge that we were going to cum together, that I would experience his orgasm as intensely as my own, sent me spiraling toward the edge. Then I felt Atlas cum, filling Caden to the brim, triggering Caden's orgasm at the same time.

"Wild," I panted, my voice breaking. "I'm going to—"

"Yes," he breathed, his strokes becoming more urgent. "Cum with me, Elias. Let me feel it."

When my climax hit, it was like nothing I'd ever experienced. My vision went white as pleasure crashed through me in waves, amplified and reflected through our bond until I couldn't tell where I ended and Wild began. I felt his release as clearly as my own, his cry of my name mixing with mine as we came together, our releases coating our stomachs and his hand.

For a moment, nothing seemed to exist except this mutual pleasure buzzing between all four of us at the same time. Even though we were in different rooms, it was like we'd all had some sort of strange telepathic orgy. But as I opened my eyes and saw Wild above me, I felt something different. It wasn't just lust or pleasure. It was… gratitude.

"You're welcome," Wild whispered, feeling my emotions through the bond. "It was an honor being your first."

"But…" I began, feeling suddenly embarrassed and a little ashamed. "We didn't even do anything…"

"Just because you didn't fuck me doesn't mean it wasn't sex," Wild chuckled. "Sometimes it's just blowjobs or frotting or chains and whips. And sometimes it's getting bred like a fuckpig against a tree."

My mind reeled at this sudden onslaught of words I didn't quite understand. However, their connotations were clear through my bond with Wild. I knew *exactly* what he meant.

"I… I don't know if I'm ready for all that," I said at last. "I just… thank you."

"Don't worry," Wild grinned, kissing me once more. "We've got lots of time to practice."

"So… does this mean we're…" I couldn't bring myself to finish my sentence.

He paused for a moment, looking me over. For a moment, I felt a bright pulse in his belly, but it was quickly dampened.

"It's just sex, Elias," Wild said at last. "That's all. It doesn't have to mean anything."

I felt my stomach drop slightly as he climbed off of me, coming to rest at the edge of the bed. I thought I'd felt something stronger between just us, something more than just this magical bond. But it was probably just the orgasm talking.

"Oh… yeah," I said. "You're right."

CHAPTER 15

WILD

Something was still buzzing in the back of my mind. Ever since my frotting session with Elias the night before, I couldn't shake it. Our magical bond had deepened, of that I was certain. But there was something else… a calling that I couldn't quite place. It was unlike anything I'd ever experienced, and it made me strangely uncomfortable. So, like I usually did, I pushed it away and covered it up, trying to focus on the books in front of me instead.

We'd all gathered in Lydia's library after a rather awkward breakfast, where none of us could quite meet each other's eyes. The ethereal servants had provided an impressive spread of food that materialized on the dining room table as if summoned by our collective hunger, but the meal had been punctuated by uncomfortable silences and the occasional spike of residual arousal through our bond whenever someone's thoughts wandered to the night before.

Now, surrounded by floating books and the gentle hum of ancient magic, I was desperately trying to lose myself in Lydia's research. The emerald green journal lay open before me, its pages filled with meticulous notes about triune bonds and magical theory that should have fascinated me. Instead, I kept finding myself stealing glances at Elias, who sat across from me with the midnight blue volume, his dark hair falling across his forehead as he read.

The strange buzzing in my mind intensified whenever I looked at him, like a tuning fork struck against crystal. It wasn't unpleasant, exactly, but it was persistent and utterly distracting. Every time our eyes met, even briefly, the sensation would spike, and I'd feel something shifting in the very fabric of our bond.

"This is incredible," Caden said suddenly, breaking the contemplative silence. He held up the amber journal, his blue eyes bright with excitement. "Lydia documented everything about her relationship with Sorrel. Listen to this. '*The fae bond runs deeper than mere magical connection. It's as if our souls recognize each other across the barriers of realm and species, calling to something ancient and primal that predates the separation of our peoples*.'"

Atlas looked up from where he'd been reading over Caden's shoulder, his golden eyes thoughtful. "That sounds familiar. Pack bonds work similarly. There's recognition that goes beyond conscious choice."

"What about your journal, Wild?" Elias asked, his voice carefully neutral, though I could feel his curiosity through our connection. "What does it say about fae bonding specifically?"

I glanced down at the green leather volume in my lap, its pages seeming to shimmer with their own inner light. The text was written in multiple languages: English, Old Fae, and scripts I didn't recognize, with diagrams that moved and shifted when I wasn't looking directly at them.

"It's... complex," I said, scanning the elegant script. "Sorrel writes about something called '*soul recognition*'. Apparently, it's the idea that certain individuals are cosmically compatible, their magical signatures harmonizing in ways that transcend normal attraction or partnership."

The buzzing in my head grew stronger as I read, and I had to resist the urge to look at Elias again. Whatever was happening between us felt too big, too intense to examine closely. I'd built my entire identity around keeping things light, fun, uncomplicated. Deep emotional connections were for other people, people who didn't have to return to the political machinations of the Seelie Court eventually.

"That's almost exactly the same as a fated mate bond," Atlas replied once I'd stopped reading. "Like word for word."

"Fae don't have fated mate bonds," I said, shaking my head. "We aren't like shifters. We're sort of our own thing. I've heard of magical bonds created at birth for high-level members of the Seelie Court so they maintain power. But my family isn't powerful enough for that." I looked over at Caden and Atlas. "And no offense, but my family wouldn't have chosen to bond me to *any* of you."

"No offense taken," Atlas said with a dry chuckle. "I can't imagine my father agreeing to such a thing, either. It took long enough for him to accept Caden. He's probably gonna flip when he finds out about this tetrad."

"But that's just it," Elias said quietly, his finger tracing a passage in his grandmother's journal. "According to this, Lydia believed that some bonds aren't chosen by families or politics. They're... inevitable. Written into the very fabric of magic

itself."

He looked up then, his brown eyes meeting mine directly, and the buzzing in my head exploded into something that felt like recognition. Like coming home to a place I'd never been but somehow always known. The sensation was so intense I had to grip the arms of my chair to keep from falling.

"Wild?" Caden's voice seemed to come from very far away. "Are you alright? You look pale."

I couldn't answer. Through our bond, I could feel Elias experiencing the same overwhelming rush of... something. Connection. Certainty. A rightness that defied all logic and made my carefully constructed walls feel suddenly flimsy and inadequate.

Destiny.

Suddenly, the feeling became far too overwhelming. I pushed myself up from the chair, the force sending it clattering backwards to the ground.

"I need some time to think," I said, already heading towards the door.

But before I could reach the library door, Elias was there, his hand wrapping around my wrist. The moment our skin made contact, the buzzing sensation crystallized into something undeniable. Images flashed through our shared consciousness. They weren't memories, but glimpses of something that felt like prophecy. The two of us standing together in a place of impossible beauty, our magic intertwined so completely that we moved as one being. The sight of my own face looking at him with an expression of such profound love, it made my chest ache.

"Don't run," he whispered, his voice rough with emotion. "Please. I'm feeling it too."

I turned to face him, and what I saw in his brown eyes nearly undid me completely. Wonder, terror, and a dawning understanding that matched my own. Whatever this was between us, it was bigger than the tetrad bond, older than our individual magical signatures.

"This is impossible," I breathed, though even as I said it, I knew it wasn't true. Nothing about our situation had been possible. The bond, this place, and the way our magic sang together like it had been designed for harmony… and even though it felt right, I couldn't help being terrified.

"Is it impossible?" Elias asked, stepping closer. Behind him, I could see Caden and Atlas watching with expressions of fascination and concern. "Or is it just something we weren't prepared for?"

The green journal in my hands began to glow, its pages flipping open of their own accord to a passage I hadn't noticed before. Words appeared in Sorrel's elegant script, as if he were writing them in real time.

When soul recognition occurs, the fae involved will experience what we call the Calling. It is not mere attraction, but a fundamental reshaping of one's magical core to accommodate another consciousness. Fighting it causes pain. Accepting it leads to a bond deeper than any court magic or political alliance. Bonds are ignited via proximity, an inexplicable magnetic attraction. However, they are not fully formed until they are consummated in the fae's true shape.

"Soul recognition," I whispered, the words feeling both foreign and familiar on my tongue. "That's what this is."

Elias's grip on my wrist tightened, and through our connection, I felt his fear warring with something that looked suspiciously like hope. "Are you saying we're... fated mates?"

"Sort of?" I said, swallowing hard as I tried to process what was happening. "Fae don't have fated mates like werewolves do. This is... different, but also similar."

I could feel Elias's pulse racing beneath my fingers where they touched his skin. Every point of contact between us sent waves of that strange buzzing recognition through my entire body.

"Then what is it?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Atlas moved closer, his protective energy flowing through our tetrad bond. "Whatever's happening between you two is affecting all of us. It's like your connection is... intensifying everything."

"Soul recognition is rare," I explained, struggling to find the right words as the journal's revelations echoed in my mind. "It's not something arranged or planned. It just... happens. The old stories say it's when two magical signatures are so perfectly complementary that they can't help but call to each other."

Caden joined us, the amber journal still clutched in his hands. "According to Lydia's notes, she and Sorrel experienced something similar. Sorrel called it the *Calling*, like their souls were two halves of the same magical equation that had to come together to make them whole."

Elias hadn't released my wrist, and I couldn't bring myself to pull away despite the overwhelming intensity of the connection. Through our bond, I could feel his methodical mind trying to categorize and understand what was happening, while simultaneously being swept away by the raw power of it.

"But we barely tolerate each other most of the time," Elias said, though the words lacked conviction. "How could we possibly be... whatever this is?"

I laughed despite myself, the sound slightly hysterical. "Maybe that's why we drove each other crazy from the start. We were fighting this."

The mansion around us seemed to hum in agreement, the walls pulsing with soft light that matched the rhythm of our

synchronized heartbeats. Books floated from various shelves, arranging themselves in a circle around us as if the house itself was trying to provide answers.

"It says the bond isn't fully formed until..." Elias trailed off, a flush creeping up his neck as he recalled the passage from the journal.

"Until consummation in my true form," I finished for him, feeling my neck flare with heat. "My fae form. The one I only wear at home."

"That's how the mate bond is finalized as well. Caden and I had to…" Atlas cleared his throat. "Maybe we should give you two some privacy to figure this out."

"No," Elias and I said simultaneously, the synchronicity of our response sending another jolt through our connection.

"We're all part of this," I continued, barely finding the courage to fully meet Elias's gaze. There was a cold sense of terror building in my belly at the truth in my words. "The tetrad bond connects all four of us. Whatever this additional... thing... is between Elias and me, it affects all of us."

"So, what should we do?" Caden asked, his gaze focused on me.

"We practice for now," I said, taking a deep breath, trying to maintain my composure. "Elias and I are both… *not ready* to finalize the bond." I turned to him, feeling the wave of relief wash through him. "I think we might need to take this a bit slower."

"We can't," Elias said, shaking his head. "The Purity Front is already trying to find this place. If we slow down… that could be a death sentence."

"Well, I'm not ready," I said with a tone of finality. "And I'm not gonna be terrorized or frightened or scared into doing something I'm not ready to do." My voice was rising with the anger filling my chest at the unfairness of the entire situation. "Fuck the Elder Council and fuck Blackwood for doing this to us in the first place!"

"Wild…" Caden said softly, reaching for me.

"Don't," I snapped, pulling my arm away. I tossed Lydia's journal onto the table, the sense of overwhelm complete. "I need some time away from all this bullshit. I just… I can't do this."

I stormed out of the library, my heart pounding in my chest as the enormity of what was happening threatened to suffocate me. Soul recognition. The Calling. It sounded like something out of the ancient fae stories my nursemaid used to tell me before my parents replaced her with tutors more focused on court etiquette.

The mansion seemed to respond to my agitation, corridors shifting and doors appearing where none had been before. I followed the path it created for me, not caring where it led as long as it was away from those knowing eyes, away from Elias and the terrifying inevitability of what lay between us.

Eventually, I found myself in a glass-walled conservatory filled with plants from both realms. Massive fae flowers with luminescent petals grew alongside more mundane witch herbs, their scents mingling in the humid air. It felt like home in a way that made my chest ache.

"Fuck," I whispered, collapsing onto a stone bench surrounded by night-blooming jasmine. "This isn't fair."

I'd spent my entire life crafting a perfect persona. I was a carefree, sexually liberated fae who cared about nothing but pleasure and fun. It was my shield against the suffocating expectations of the Seelie Court, against my parents' disappointment, against ever being hurt. And now this... this *bond* was threatening to tear it all down, exposing the terrified, vulnerable creature beneath and locking me into a box forever.

The worst part was that I wanted it. Beneath my panic and denial, there was a yearning so profound it made me shake. I wanted Elias. Wanted the connection, the completion, the belonging that soul recognition promised. And that terrified me more than anything the Purity Front could ever do.

"I thought I might find you here," Atlas's deep voice broke through my spiraling thoughts.

I looked up to see the werewolf standing in the doorway, his massive frame silhouetted against the light from the hallway. Of all the people who might have followed me, Atlas was the last I expected.

"Come to drag me back to my destiny?" I asked, unable to keep the bitterness from my voice.

Atlas snorted, crossing the conservatory to sit beside me. "I'm not dragging anyone anywhere. Just thought you might want some company from someone who understands."

"Understands what?"

"What it's like to have your entire life turned upside down by a magical bond you never asked for." He leaned back, his golden eyes reflecting the soft glow of the fae flowers. "The day I realized Caden was my mate, I nearly ran all the way back to my pack's territory."

That surprised me. Atlas had always seemed so certain, so comfortable with his connection to Caden. "Why?"

"Because I was terrified," he admitted, his voice unusually soft. "I was supposed to be the next alpha. Had my whole life mapped out. Lead the pack, make strategic alliances, and maybe eventually find a nice werewolf girl to have pups with. Then suddenly there's this shy half-dryad witch boy with freckles, and my wolf is howling that he's mine."

I couldn't help but laugh despite my mood. "Caden does have great freckles."

"The best," Atlas agreed with a fond smile. "But that's not the point. The point is that bonds like these, whether they're werewolf mate bonds or fae soul recognition, they don't care about your plans. They don't care about what's convenient or what makes sense. They just are."

"That's what scares me," I admitted, plucking a luminescent petal from a nearby flower. "I've spent my entire life avoiding anything permanent. Anything that could tie me down."

"Because you're afraid of being hurt," Atlas said. It wasn't a question.

I glanced at him sharply. "How would you know that?"

"The tetrad bond goes both ways, Wild. We all feel bits and pieces of each other now." He shrugged those massive shoulders. "Plus, it doesn't take a genius to see that all your partying and hookups are just ways to keep people at a distance."

"I like partying and hookups," I protested, but it sounded weak even to my own ears.

"Sure you do. But you also use them as shields. No one can hurt you if they never get close enough to matter." Atlas leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. "The problem is, Elias already matters. He's already under your skin. Fighting it is just going to make you both miserable."

The truth of his words hit me with physical force. Elias did matter. Had mattered from the moment we'd first clashed in Professor Blackwood's class, though I'd been too stubborn to admit it.

"What if I don't want to fight in a war?" I whispered. "And what if I'm not what Elias needs or even wants? It seems unfair to force him into a life with me."

Atlas was quiet for a long moment, the only sound was the gentle rustle of magical plants responding to our emotions. When he finally spoke, his voice carried the weight of hard-won wisdom.

"You think any of us wanted this war?" he asked, gesturing toward the mansion around us. "You think Caden wanted to be hunted for his mixed heritage? You think Elias wanted to discover his family were magical supremacists?" Atlas shook his head. "Sometimes life doesn't give us choices, Wild. Sometimes we just get thrust into situations and have to figure out how to survive them." He stood up, placing a hand on my shoulder. "But if you want to go, we won't stop you. However, before you run away again or avoid a connection, why don't you just talk to Elias? Ask him what *he* wants."

Before I could say anything more, Atlas was walking away. I was left in the conservatory surrounded by fae greenery with my head spinning. I found myself wishing I'd never come to Widdershins Academy, that I'd never left the orgy, that I'd never even met Elias.

I just wanted things to be easy again.

CHAPTER 16

ELIAS

Our first full day in the mansion had been tougher than I expected. When I went to bed the previous night with Wild's cum smeared over my belly and our bond glowing, it felt like everything was right in the world. But the dawn brought reality crashing back in and before I knew it, our entire lives were unraveling at the seams.

Being asked by the Elder Council to help them defeat the Purity Front was so unexpected that I really hadn't had time to process it. At first, it felt like an honor, a way to salvage the Thorne family name after my parents had sullied it. But the longer I thought about it, the more I didn't understand.

The Elder Council was a group of the most powerful witches and shifters in the entire world. They helped keep the paranormal world a secret from the humans and cleaned up any messes that threatened our exposure. They also kept the paranormal world in line and prosecuted anyone that broke our most sacred laws. That meant the Purity Front was their responsibility to stop. So why did they need help from a group of college students who had formed an unstudied bond completely by accident?

Wild's reaction was right. It was completely unfair of them to ask us to permanently bind ourselves together for the rest of our lives and all eternity just because they didn't want to face the Purity Front head on. Of course, that didn't stop me from feeling depressed that Wild didn't want to bond with me. So, I tried to cover it up with anger at the people in charge.

Blackwood had no right to give us the Resonance Stones without fully explaining the risks. The Dean had no right to lock us down after he failed to keep the campus properly warded. And the Elder Council should never have asked us to stop a war for them before it could get out of control. Every single adult who was supposed to be protecting us had failed and now we were the ones that had to pay the price.

I found myself pacing the room Wild and I had shared the night before, my emotions a churning mess of anger, hurt, and confusion. The scent of our intimacy still lingered on the sheets, a painful reminder of how close we'd been just hours ago. Now everything felt fractured, uncertain.

A soft knock at the door interrupted my spiraling thoughts. I expected to see Wild, maybe coming to apologize or explain. Instead, Caden peered around the doorframe, his expression cautious.

"Can I come in?" he asked quietly.

I nodded, settling heavily on the edge of the bed. Caden entered and closed the door behind him, then surprised me by sitting beside me rather than maintaining his usual respectful distance.

"You're hurt," he said simply. It wasn't a question.

Through our tetrad bond, I supposed my emotional turmoil was probably broadcasting to all of them like a beacon. "I don't want to talk about it."

"I know." Caden was quiet for a moment, his fingers absently tracing patterns on the coverlet. "Can I tell you something about Wild that he probably wouldn't want you to know?"

I looked at him sharply. "Caden..."

"He's terrified," Caden continued, ignoring my protest. "Not of the bond or even of you specifically. He's terrified of permanence because the only permanent things in his life have caused him pain."

Despite myself, I felt my curiosity pique. Wild had always deflected any serious conversations about his past, keeping things light and surface-level even as our connection deepened.

"What do you mean?"

Caden sighed, running a hand through his auburn hair. "His parents... they're not exactly warm people. They see him as a political tool, a way to advance their standing in the Seelie Court. Every relationship he's ever had, every friendship, has been evaluated for its potential benefit to the family. He learned early that caring about someone just gave them power to hurt him. So he just… *stopped*."

The revelation hit me like a physical blow. Through our bond, I'd sensed Wild's loneliness, his desperate need to be

accepted for who he truly was rather than what he could provide. But I hadn't understood the depth of it.

"He cares about you," Caden said softly. "More than he's probably ever cared about anyone. That's exactly why he's running."

"Then why did he say it was just sex?" The words came out more bitter than I intended. "Why make it clear that it didn't mean anything?"

"Because he's protecting himself the only way he knows how." Caden turned to face me fully. "Think about it, Elias. If this soul recognition thing is real, if you two are truly bonded in some cosmic way, then he can't just walk away when things get complicated. He can't use his usual shields. He's in a situation he's never been in, and his defenses are completely useless."

I felt my anger beginning to transform into something else. Understanding, maybe. Or at least the beginning of it.

"So, what am I supposed to do?" I asked, staring down at my hands. "Just accept that he'll keep pushing me away every time we get close?"

"No," Caden said, his voice gentle but firm. "I think you need to meet him halfway. Show him that permanence doesn't have to mean pain."

I let out a hollow laugh. "That's easier said than done when I'm not exactly an expert on healthy relationships myself. The Thorne family isn't exactly known for its emotional openness."

"Maybe that's why you two recognize each other's souls," Caden suggested, a small smile playing at his lips. "You're both broken in complementary ways."

The thought was oddly comforting. Through our bond, I could feel Caden's sincerity, his genuine desire to help both Wild and me navigate this impossible situation.

"Atlas went to talk to him earlier," he added. "Wild's still in the conservatory."

I nodded, taking a deep breath. "I should go find him, shouldn't I?"

"Only if you want to," Caden said, standing. "But for what it's worth, I think you two are good for each other. When you're not too busy driving each other crazy."

"Really?" I asked, genuinely curious. "Do you think we stand a chance?"

"I know you do," Caden nodded. "Atlas and I will be right here to help you because… well, we care about you and Wild, too. This bond isn't just between you and him, you know? I'm finding my feelings growing for you two as well. So is Atlas." He shook his head. "It's getting a little complicated, but I know you and Wild are meant for one another." Caden took a step forward, placing a hand on my shoulder. "So, if you're ready, go talk to him."

I smiled and pulled Caden into a quick hug before I headed for the door. As I made my way through the mansion's shifting corridors, I tried to organize my thoughts. What would I even say to Wild? That I understood his fear? That I shared it? The truth was, the idea of being cosmically bound to anyone terrified me almost as much as it seemed to terrify him.

The mansion seemed to guide me, doors appearing and hallways shortening until I found myself at the entrance to a massive glass-walled conservatory. Through the crystalline panels, I could see Wild sitting alone on a stone bench, surrounded by luminescent flowers that seemed to pulse in time with his breathing.

He looked smaller somehow, hunched over with his arms wrapped around himself. Vulnerable in a way I'd never seen him before. For a moment, I considered turning back, giving him more time. But the pull between us was undeniable, drawing me forward despite my hesitation. Caden's reassuring words echoed in my head and I forced my feet to move.

I pushed open the glass door, the humid air washing over me in a wave of earthy scents and fae magic. Wild looked up, his green eyes widening slightly when he saw me.

"Atlas sent you?" he said, turning his gaze back to the floor.

"No," I replied, approaching slowly. "Caden told me where you were, but I came on my own."

Wild nodded, making room for me on the bench, though he didn't meet my eyes. "Come to convince me to complete the bond? Save the world? Be a good little soldier in the Elder Council's war?"

"Actually," I said, settling beside him, careful to leave space between us, "I came to tell you I think you're right."

That got his attention. His head snapped up, those fae-bright eyes searching my face for any sign of deception. "What?"

"The Elder Council, Blackwood, even my own family... they've all manipulated us from the beginning." I stared at a cluster of night-blooming jasmine, its sweet scent almost overwhelming in the enclosed space. "We never had a real choice in any of this. The Resonance Stones, the bond, being brought here... it's all been orchestrated by people who care more about their political games than what we actually want."

Wild's surprise rippled through our connection, followed by something that felt like relief. "I wasn't expecting you to agree with me."

"Neither was I," I admitted, finally turning to look at him. "But sitting in that room, thinking about everything that's happened... I realized I've been so focused on living up to everyone else's expectations that I never lived my own life. I never even stopped to ask what I *actually* wanted."

"And what do you want?" Wild asked quietly, his voice barely audible over the gentle hum of magical plants around us.

I took a shaky breath, knowing that my answer would change everything between us. "I want you," I said simply. "Not

because some ancient magic says we're supposed to be together. Not because the Elder Council needs us to save the world. I want you because when I'm with you, I feel like myself for the first time in my life."

Wild's breath caught, and through our bond I felt the walls he'd built around his heart trembling. "Elias..."

"I'm terrified too," I continued, reaching for his hand. When he didn't pull away, I twined our fingers together. "I've never been in love before. I don't even know if that's what this is. And I don't know how to do any of this. But I'd rather figure it out with you than spend the rest of my life wondering what we could have been."

"Love?" Wild whispered, the word hanging between us like a fragile butterfly.

Heat flooded my cheeks as I realized what I'd said. "I... yes. I feel like I'm falling for you, Wild. Maybe I have been since that first day in Blackwood's classroom when you challenged everything I thought I knew about magic."

For a long moment, Wild was completely still, his emotions cycling through our bond too quickly for me to follow. Fear, wonder, longing, terror... and underneath it all, something warm and golden that made my heart race.

"I don't know how to be in love," he finally said, his voice thick with unshed tears. "I don't know how to be a boyfriend or a… a *mate*. What if I screw this up? What if I hurt you?"

"What if you don't?" I countered, squeezing his hand. "What if we're both terrible at this and we figure it out together? What if we get to choose our own path instead of letting everyone else decide for us?"

Wild laughed, a sound caught between joy and hysteria. "You're suggesting we rebel against cosmic destiny itself?"

"I'm suggesting we make our own destiny," I said, turning to face him fully. "The soul recognition, the calling... maybe it's real. Maybe we are meant to be together. But that doesn't matter. What matters is that *we* make the choice and that *we* choose to be together."

Wild's eyes met mine, and for once, I saw none of his usual deflecting humor or carefully constructed indifference. Just raw vulnerability and something that looked dangerously like hope.

"Our own destiny," he repeated softly, his thumb tracing circles on my palm. "I've spent my whole life avoiding anything that felt like fate. Every time someone tried to tell me who I was supposed to be or what I was supposed to want, I ran in the opposite direction."

"I know," I said. "And I've spent my whole life trying to be exactly what everyone told me to be. Maybe that's why we drive each other crazy. And why I find you so damn frustrating."

The luminescent flowers around us seemed to pulse brighter, responding to the surge of emotion flowing between us. Through our bond, I could feel Wild's internal struggle, his desperate desire to believe what I was saying, warring with his lifetime of learned caution.

A small smile played at the corners of his mouth. "I do excel at being frustrating."

"It's one of your many talents," I agreed, returning his smile.

Wild's fingers tightened around mine, and through our connection, I felt something shift, a tentative lowering of barriers that had been firmly in place since we'd met.

"So… we're going to do this?" he asked, leaning his shoulder against mine.

"I'm game if you are," I replied, wrapping an arm around his waist.

"I'll give it a shot."

"Also, just so you know, apparently Caden and Atlas are developing feelings for us too," I added with a sigh. "I have no idea how to handle that."

Wild let out a low laugh. "This whole tetrad thing is really complicated, isn't it?"

"Seems like it."

"Well," he said, kissing me on the cheek and sending a pulse of warmth through my body. "As long as you're cool with not being monogamous, I don't think we'll have an issue. Alpha wolves are supposed to be great in the sack. And Caden's plant powers? Well, let's just say I've heard dryads can do some incredible things with their magic."

A jolt of excitement coursed through me before pooling in my groin as I imagined all the ways they might spice things up in the bedroom. I felt the heat flush into my cheeks as I tried to push them away, but the images kept pushing through. Wild just chuckled beside me.

"Don't worry," he said softly, kissing my cheek again. "We'll take it slow. Nothing says we have to complete the bond today or even this week. Let's just practice our magic and take our time getting to know one another, alright?"

I nodded, pulling him tighter against me. "Alright."

CHAPTER 17

ELIAS

It had been three days since Wild and I chose to give our bond a shot. Caden and Atlas had done their best to give us space, but I was still feeling too nervous to push things very far. Of course, that didn't stop me from sleeping next to Wild every night with a raging hard-on. Wild was just as horny as I was, but he was a gentleman too, always patient as I tried to find my courage. Usually, we ended up jerking off together with some light touching, but I hadn't been able to go any further than that.

For some reason I thought the first time I had sex, the nervousness would just disappear. *Forever*. But instead, I found it to be the ever-present irritation at the back of my mind. My brain kept trying to convince me that my attraction to him was wrong, that it wasn't allowed. I knew that was my upbringing talking, a sense of impropriety infecting every selfish urge I'd ever had. But I wasn't going to let it win. I needed some time to work through it, that was all.

Wild, sensing my internal struggle through our bond, had been nothing but understanding. He never pushed or made me feel inadequate for my hesitation. Instead, he'd taken to leaving little gifts on my pillow. Fae flowers that glowed softly in the dark, crystallized dewdrops that tasted like summer mornings, small tokens that said *I'm thinking of you* without any pressure attached.

This morning was different, though. I woke to find Wild already dressed and sitting by the window, the emerald journal open in his lap. Pale morning light streamed through the glass, catching the copper highlights in his hair and making him look ethereal.

"Morning," I murmured, stretching beneath the silk sheets.

He looked up with a smile that sent warmth cascading through our bond. "Good morning, beautiful. Sleep well?"

The casual endearment still made my heart skip, even after three days of hearing it. "Better than I have in weeks. What are you reading?"

Wild's expression grew thoughtful as he closed the journal. "More of Sorrel's notes about the soul recognition process. Apparently, there are... stages to it."

I sat up, suddenly more alert. "What kind of stages?"

"Well, we've already experienced the initial recognition - that overwhelming buzzing sensation when we look at each other." His fingers absently traced the journal's leather binding. "According to this, the next stage involves what he calls 'emotional synchronization.' Our feelings start aligning more closely, boundaries between our individual consciousness becoming more fluid."

Through our bond, I could sense his mixture of fascination and apprehension at the prospect. It mirrored my own complicated feelings perfectly.

"And after that?" I asked, though part of me dreaded the answer.

"Physical manifestation of the bond. Which means..." He gestured vaguely at himself. "My fae form will start asserting itself more strongly. I'll have less control over when the changes occur."

I'd only caught glimpses of Wild's true fae nature, the way his eyes glowed when his emotions ran high, how flowers seemed to bloom brighter in his presence, the otherworldly grace that marked his movements. The thought of seeing him fully transformed was both thrilling and intimidating.

"Is that why you've been so patient with me?" I asked quietly. "Because you're waiting for these stages to progress naturally?"

Wild set the journal aside and moved to sit on the edge of the bed, close enough that I could feel the warmth radiating from his skin. "I'm patient with you because I care about you, Elias. Not because of some mystical timeline." His hand found mine beneath the covers. "But I won't lie. Knowing there's a natural progression takes some of the pressure off. We don't have to force anything."

Relief flooded through me at his words. The bond between us pulsed gently, carrying his sincerity and affection in waves that made my chest tight with emotion.

"Thank you," I whispered, bringing his hand to my lips and pressing a soft kiss against his knuckles. "For understanding."

"Always," Wild replied, his green eyes crinkling at the corners. "Besides, I'm enjoying the slow build. Makes everything more... intense when we do get there."

The heat in his gaze sent a shiver down my spine, and through our bond, I felt his desire kindle in response to mine. It was still strange, this constant feedback loop of emotions and sensations, but I was starting to find comfort in it rather than anxiety. Besides, I liked feeling those twitches in his jeans. They turned me on far more than I wanted to admit.

"Speaking of intense," Wild continued, standing reluctantly, "Caden and Atlas want us to try some serious magical practice today. Apparently, Atlas found something in the crimson journal about tetrad battle magic."

I groaned, falling back against the pillows. "Do we have to? We've been practicing non-stop."

"The faster we master this, the sooner we can focus on more... pleasurable activities." Wild waggled his eyebrows suggestively, making me laugh despite my reluctance.

"Fine," I conceded, throwing back the covers. "Give me fifteen minutes to shower."

Wild's eyes darkened as they traced over my sleep-rumpled form, lingering on the obvious bulge in my boxers. "Need any help with that?"

For a moment, I was tempted. The thought of Wild's hands on me, of water cascading over both our bodies... but my familiar anxiety resurfaced, dampening the spark before it could fully ignite.

"Maybe next time," I said, trying to hide my disappointment in myself.

Wild just smiled, pressing a quick kiss to my forehead. "I'll save you some breakfast. The ethereal servants have been working at it all morning. I could smell it wafting up through the halls."

After he left, I stood under the shower's hot spray, trying to sort through my tangled emotions. Why was I still holding back? Wild had made it clear he wanted me. I certainly wanted him. We'd already been intimate in several ways, yet something still stopped me from taking that final step. I didn't know if it was the finalization of our bond that scared me or just plain performance anxiety. He clearly liked my cock, but I had zero practice using it. After his years of fae-fueled orgies, wouldn't I just be a disappointment to him?

By the time I made it downstairs to the kitchen, the others were already finishing their breakfast. Atlas was gesturing animatedly, his massive hands sketching patterns in the air as he explained something to Caden and Wild. There was half a sausage still hanging out of his mouth as he spoke.

"—and if we position ourselves at the cardinal points, the power should flow in a perfect circuit," he was saying as I entered.

"Morning, sleepyhead," Caden greeted me with a warm smile. "We saved you some of everything."

The plate waiting for me held what looked like ordinary pancakes, but they shimmered with an iridescent glow and smelled like nothing I'd ever encountered before. It was a mix of honey, wildflowers, and something indefinably magical. Next to it was another plate filled entirely with meats, clearly Atlas's contribution to my nutrition. It was adorable.

"Thanks," I said, sliding into the empty chair beside Wild. His hand immediately found my knee under the table, a casual touch that sent warmth spreading through me. "What's this about cardinal points?"

Atlas pushed the crimson journal toward me, and I looked down at the open page. It showed intricate diagrams of four figures positioned at what appeared to be the cardinal directions, with lines of magical energy flowing between them in complex patterns.

"Tetrad combat formations," Atlas explained, swallowing the rest of his sausage. "According to this, when we position ourselves correctly and synchronize our magical signatures, we can create a power matrix that's exponentially stronger than anything we've managed so far."

I studied the diagrams more closely, my academic mind immediately drawn to the mathematical precision of the formations. "It's based on sacred geometry," I murmured, tracing one of the energy patterns with my finger. "Each position corresponds to our individual magical natures, but the real power comes from the intersection points."

"Exactly," Caden said, leaning forward with excitement. "And look at this part." He pointed to a passage written in what appeared to be multiple languages. "It says that once we master the basic formation, we can layer different types of magic on top of each other. Defensive shields, offensive strikes, even healing energies."

Wild squeezed my knee, his enthusiasm bleeding through our bond. "We could actually stand a chance against the Purity Front if we can pull this off."

The thought sobered me immediately. Despite our attempts to focus on our relationships and bond development, the reality of our situation was never far from my mind. The Purity Front was still out there, still growing stronger, still hunting people like us.

"There's just one problem," Atlas said, his expression growing serious. "The formation requires complete trust and synchronization between all four participants. Any hesitation or emotional barriers could cause the entire matrix to collapse. Or worse, backfire."

I felt my stomach clench as his words sank in. Through our bond, I sensed Wild's immediate understanding of the

implication. My ongoing struggles with intimacy and trust weren't just affecting our personal relationship anymore, they could potentially endanger all of us.

"Maybe we should wait," I said quietly, pushing my plate away despite having barely touched the magical pancakes. "Until I can get my head sorted out."

"No," Wild said firmly, his hand sliding up to cover mine. "We practice together, we figure it out together. That's what we agreed on."

"But if my issues cause the magic to backfire—"

"Then we'll deal with it," Caden interrupted gently. He reached across the table, taking my hand in his. It was an intimate gesture, and I felt his affection toward me surge through the bond. "Elias, we're all struggling with different aspects of this bond. You're not the only one with barriers to work through."

Atlas nodded in agreement, adding his hand to the mix. "The mate bond with Caden was terrifying at first. I kept trying to convince myself it wasn't real or that it was something else. There was a moment where I thought it would consume me."

"And I spent the first week after we bonded, convinced Atlas was going to realize I wasn't worth the trouble and leave," Caden added with a rueful smile. "Emotional barriers come in all shapes and sizes."

I could feel all four of us in that moment, Caden and Atlas's hands on mine, Wild's hand on my knee. All of their affection flowed through our bond, filling me with warmth from head to toe. Behind it, I felt a surge of lust, but it wasn't coming from them. It was coming from me. I realized, for the first time, that I really did *trust* these three. And that I was happy to be with them despite the circumstances.

"Thank you," I said, feeling a sudden rush of gratitude for these three men who had become so much more than friends. "I think I'm ready to try."

We finished breakfast quickly, eager to test the tetrad formation. The mansion seemed to sense our intentions, corridors shifting to lead us directly to a circular chamber I hadn't seen before. The room was massive, with a domed ceiling painted with constellations that moved subtly when I wasn't looking directly at them. The floor featured an intricate mosaic of interlocking geometric patterns, with clear markers at the four cardinal points.

"This is perfect," Atlas said, his golden eyes wide with wonder. "It's like the house knew exactly what we needed."

"Lydia must have created this space specifically for tetrad practice," Wild mused, running his fingers along the wall where crystals pulsed with soft light. "The energy conduits are already in place." He glanced back at me. "She wasn't lying. Her and Sorrel really did know we'd be here one day."

Caden moved to the northern point, his connection to growth and nurturing magic drawing him there instinctively. "I think we each have a specific position." He stepped onto the northern tile, letting out a contented sigh. "Growth. The cool earth beneath our feet."

Atlas nodded, taking his place at the western point without hesitation. "Protection. The flowing river."

Wild grinned, practically skipping to the southern marker. "Chaos. The burning sun."

That left the eastern position for me. Structure. The never-ending winds of change.

As I stepped onto my marker, the floor beneath my feet began to glow with a soft blue light. Looking around, I saw the others' positions illuminating as well. Amber for Caden, crimson for Atlas, and emerald for Wild. The colors seemed to pulse in time with our heartbeats.

"Now what?" I asked, feeling the room's energy beginning to swirl around us.

"According to the journal," Atlas replied, "we need to synchronize our breathing first, then extend our magical awareness to form the initial connection."

It sounded simple enough, but as we closed our eyes and began to breathe in unison, I felt the familiar tightness of anxiety creeping up my spine. What if I couldn't maintain the connection? What if my hesitation broke the formation?

"Elias," Wild's voice came through our bond rather than aloud, gentle but firm. "Stop overthinking. Just feel."

I took a deep breath and tried to let go, focusing on the sensation of our bond instead of my fears. Gradually, I became aware of the others' magical signatures more distinctly than ever before. Atlas's protective energy was like a steady drumbeat, Caden's nurturing power flowing like sap through a healthy tree, Wild's chaotic magic dancing and sparking like lightning.

When I finally extended my own structured magic to meet theirs, the effect was immediate and breathtaking. Lines of pure energy shot from my position to each of theirs, forming a diamond of power with me as its source. Then similar lines extended from each of them, creating a complex geometric pattern that pulsed with combined power.

"Holy shit," Wild breathed through our bond, his amazement rippling through all of us. "This is incredible."

The magical matrix we'd created was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. Where our individual magics had always felt separate and distinct, now they flowed together like instruments in a perfectly tuned orchestra. I could feel Caden's growth magic strengthening my structured spells, while Atlas's protective energy formed a foundation that allowed Wild's chaos to dance freely without becoming destructive.

"Try a simple spell," Atlas suggested, his voice tight with concentration. "Something basic."

I focused on creating a light orb, the most elementary magic I knew. But instead of the usual pale blue glow of my precise

magic, what formed above my palm was a swirling sphere of all four of our colors, amber and crimson and emerald threads weaving through my blue in patterns that defied logic.

"It's beautiful," Caden whispered, his own orb forming at the northern point, equally complex and radiant.

"By the gods…" Atlas breathed, holding up his own orb of magic, something normal werewolves couldn't do. "I… I've never felt anything like this."

Wild let out a whoop of joy, his sphere crackling with chaotic energy that somehow harmonized perfectly with the rest. "We're doing it! We're actually doing it!"

But as our excitement built, I felt something reverberate through the mansion. Then a loud bang echoed through the halls. It happened again and again, each one sounding hollow and far away. Our magic faded away simultaneously, confusion and worry filling the bond between us. I turned on my heel to see one of the far doors opening, an ethereal servant stepping inside, their form a shimmering silvery mist.

"The mansion," it said in its normal monotone. "Is under attack."

CHAPTER 18
WILD

The sound of splintering wood echoed through the mansion's halls like thunder, each crash sending vibrations through the floor beneath our feet. Through our bond, I felt all four of us go rigid with fear and battle-ready tension simultaneously.

"How did they find us?" Elias whispered, his face pale as parchment. Through our connection, I could feel his terror warring with a fierce protectiveness that surprised me with its intensity.

Atlas was already shifting, his human form rippling as his werewolf nature surged to the surface. "The wards," he growled, his voice deeper and more guttural than usual. "Something's trying to break through Lydia's protections."

Another thunderous crash shook the mansion, closer this time. Dust rained from the painted ceiling above us, and several of the glowing crystals embedded in the walls flickered ominously.

"We need to get out of here," Caden said, his usual calm cracking as panic bled through our tetrad bond. "If the Purity Front has found a way to breach the sanctuary—"

"No," I interrupted, surprising myself with the firmness in my voice. The chaotic magic inside me was responding to the threat, crackling along my skin like barely contained lightning. "The wards will hold. And if they don't, we'll be prepared. But we're not going to run. Not this time."

The ethereal servant flickered, its silvery form wavering like smoke in a breeze. "The eastern ward line has been compromised," it reported in that same emotionless tone. "Unknown magical signatures are attempting forced entry through the Veil crossing."

"How many?" Atlas demanded, his golden eyes now fully wolf-bright as his protective instincts blazed through our bond.

"Seventeen distinct magical signatures detected. Witch magic primarily, with some unfamiliar artifacts amplifying their power."

My stomach dropped. Seventeen Purity Front operatives, armed with magical artifacts powerful enough to crack wards that had stood for decades. We were four college students who had barely mastered basic tetrad formations.

"We're not ready for this," Elias said, echoing my thoughts. His structured magic was already weaving defensive patterns around us instinctively. "The formation we just attempted. It was our first successful synchronization. We can't possibly—"

Another crash, this one so violent it sent several books tumbling from their floating positions around the chamber. The constellation ceiling flickered, stars winking out one by one as the mansion's power grid strained against whatever was battering the outer defenses.

"We don't have a choice," I said, my fae nature responding to the threat with a surge of wild defiance. "The tetrad formation worked. We felt the power flowing between us. If we can recreate that—"

"If we can recreate it without getting ourselves killed," Atlas corrected grimly. "Combat magic is different from practice orbs, Wild. One mistake and we could all end up as magical feedback casualties."

Through our bond, I felt Caden's quiet terror mixing with a growing determination that reminded me why I'd fallen for all three of these men. "Then we do combat magic," he said simply, moving back to his northern position. "We reinforce the wards from the inside and make sure anyone who touches them *regrets it*."

"Regrets it how?" Elias asked, his eyes wide with fear.

"Councilor Ashwick said the river outside is full of dead spirits, right?" I said, the thought hitting me like a freight train. "Let's give them some witches to attack. To drag down the river into oblivion itself."

"Wild, that's dark even for you," Elias said, but I could feel a flicker of consideration through our bond.

"It's not dark, it's practical," I argued, already moving back to my southern position. "These people want us dead. They've attacked schools, killed dozens of innocent students like us. They're not going to stop. And they don't deserve mercy."

Atlas growled his agreement, his partial transformation making his voice rumble like distant thunder. "The fae's right. We need to fight with everything we have."

Another violent crash shook the mansion, and this time I could feel something ancient and powerful beginning to tear. The

sensation was like fabric ripping slowly, methodically, each thread of Lydia's protective magic being severed one by one.

"Take your positions," Elias commanded, surprising me with his sudden authority. He moved to the eastern marker, his magic already forming complex patterns around his hands. "We'll reinforce the eastern ward line first, then push outward."

We moved into formation, the floor lighting up beneath our feet with our signature colors. The tetrad connection snapped into place almost instantly this time, our desperation eliminating the hesitation we'd struggled with earlier. Power surged between us, raw and primal, coursing through the geometric lines connecting our positions.

"Focus on the eastern boundary," Elias directed, his voice steady despite the fear I could feel pulsing through our bond. "Caden, growth magic to strengthen what remains of Lydia's wards. Atlas, protective barriers layered on top. Wild—"

"I'll disrupt whatever they're using to break through," I finished, already channeling my fae magic toward the eastern wall. "And you weave it all back together."

The mansion trembled again, but this time I could feel our combined magic racing through its foundations, seeking the weakened points in its defenses. Through our connection, I sensed the moment our power reached the eastern boundary, and the dark, corrupted energy that was eating away at it from the outside.

"They're using blood magic," Caden gasped, his horror rippling through our bond along with choppy fear-filled memories of his father. "They're sacrificing something to fuel their attack."

"Not something," Atlas growled. "Someone. I can smell human blood."

Rage exploded through me, white-hot and consuming. "These bastards claim to be fighting for purity, and they're using the darkest magic imaginable?"

"Focus, Wild," Elias commanded, though I could feel his own fury matching mine. "Channel that anger into the connection."

I did as he said, letting my rage fuel my chaotic magic rather than disrupt our formation. The power flowing between us intensified, becoming something wild and dangerous that made the air itself crackle with electricity.

Through our bond, I could suddenly see what was happening outside the mansion. Seventeen robed figures standing in a circle around what appeared to be a human sacrifice, their combined magic hammering against Lydia's wards like a battering ram. Each impact sent cracks spiderwebbing through the protective barriers, darkness seeping through the fissures like poison.

"There," I hissed, focusing my chaotic magic on the ritual circle. "I can feel their connection points."

Through our tetrad bond, I shared the vision with the others. Caden made a sound of disgust at the sight of the bloodied altar, while Atlas's protective instincts flared so violently that golden light began radiating from his position.

"You guys reinforce the wards," I growled, feeling my body begin to shift. My voice dropped low as my ears extended, my full lanky fae form taking shape. "I'm going to awaken the dead."

The transformation hit me like a tidal wave, my fae nature surging forth in a way I'd never experienced before. My skin began to glow with an inner light, freckles shimmering like constellations across my body. My hair lengthened, swirling around my head like living flame as my ears elongated to delicate points. Through our bond, I felt Elias's awe at seeing my true form for the first time, his magic faltering momentarily before strengthening with renewed determination.

"Wild, be careful," he warned, his voice tight with concern. "Necromantic magic is forbidden for a reason."

"This isn't necromancy," I corrected, my voice resonating with harmonics that hadn't been present in my human form. "It's invitation. The dead are already there, waiting. I'm just... opening the door."

I reached out with my fae senses, extending my awareness beyond the mansion's boundaries to the river of souls that flowed through the Veil. The spirits there were restless, hungry, drawn to the warmth of life but unable to cross back into the realm of the living. I could feel their cold fingers reaching for the Purity Front witches, sensing the dark magic they wielded.

"Guide them," Caden said, his growth magic weaving through mine in an unexpected synergy. "The spirits need a path."

I nodded, understanding flowing between us without words. While Elias and Atlas reinforced the mansion's defenses, Caden and I redirected our combined energy toward the river. Through our connection, I pulled a tendril of Caden's growth magic into my chaotic weave, using it to create a bridge, not solid enough for the spirits to cross completely into our realm, but substantial enough for them to reach the Purity Front's ritual circle.

"It's working," Atlas growled, his wolf-bright eyes fixed on something none of us could physically see. "I can smell their fear."

Through our bond, flashes of the scene outside rippled between us. The robed figures faltering as ghostly hands emerged from the water, grasping at their ankles. Screams echoing across the Veil as the spirits recognized the dark magic for what it was, a violation of natural law.

The mansion shuddered again, but this time it felt different. Not an attack, but a response. The walls around us began to pulse with renewed energy, as if Lydia's enchantments were drawing strength from our tetrad magic.

"The mansion is helping us," Elias realized, his magic flowing into the very foundation of the sanctuary. "It's using our power to rebuild its defenses."

A distant scream pierced through the Veil, followed by another. Through our connection, I caught glimpses of the chaos as the Purity Front's formation broke. One of the robed figures was being dragged toward the water, spectral hands clutching at his limbs while his companions tried desperately to hold onto him.

“They’re breaking,” I snarled, my fae form crackling with wild energy as more spirits answered my call. Through our bond, I could feel the others’ shock at the violence of what we were unleashing, but also their grim satisfaction. These weren’t innocent victims. These were murderers who had spilled blood in the name of their twisted ideology.

The screaming intensified, and through our tetrad connection, I could see the Purity Front’s ritual circle collapsing entirely. Three of their number had already been pulled into the river, their life force consumed by hungry spirits who had been denied crossing for far too long. The remaining witches were scrambling to retreat, their coordinated attack dissolving into panicked flight.

“The wards are stabilizing,” Elias reported, his voice tight with concentration as his magic wove through the mansion’s defenses like silver thread. “Whatever they were using to break through, it’s failing.”

“Good,” Atlas growled, his protective energy radiating outward in waves that made the very air shimmer. “Let them run back to their masters with their tails between their legs.”

But even as the immediate threat receded, I could feel something else stirring in the Veil. The spirits we’d awakened weren’t satisfied with just three souls. They’d tasted life again, felt the warmth of blood and breath, and they wanted more. Through my fae senses, I could feel them pressing against the barriers between realms, testing the boundaries I’d created.

“Wild,” Caden said urgently, his growth magic flickering with alarm. “The spirits... they’re not going back.”

“Yes,” I growled. “They are.”

Tapping into my deep well of fae magic, I drew up the power of fire, the symbol of my southern point in the tetrad. The others, despite their obvious exhaustion, gave me what they had left as I summoned up a massive wall of fire to surround the mansion completely. The spirits, drawn by the warmth, disintegrated against the magical flames. And the rest, seeing their brethren turned to ethereal ash, turned tail and fled toward oblivion.

As they went, I felt one more spirit join them, happy to finally be at peace. It was the sacrifice for the witch's blood magic ritual.

All at once the lines of power connecting us all faded, our consciousness leaving the Veil outside the mansion and returning to the circular room built just for us. I fell to my knees as the exhaustion set in, my body shrinking back into my more human-looking form.

“We… We did it,” I panted, my arms shaking as I tried to hold myself up.

Elias was beside me in an instant, his arms wrapping around my trembling form as aftershocks of magical exhaustion rippled through our bond. “Easy,” he murmured, his voice rough with his own fatigue. “I’ve got you.”

Through our connection, I could feel the others’ similar depletion. Atlas had collapsed back against the western wall, his partial transformation slowly receding as golden light faded from his eyes. Caden sat heavily on his marker, face pale and drawn, amber energy still flickering weakly around his fingertips.

“That was...” Caden started, then trailed off, apparently lacking words for what we’d just accomplished.

“Terrifying,” Atlas finished, pushing himself upright with visible effort. “And incredible. And probably illegal in seventeen different realms.”

I let out a shaky laugh, leaning into Elias’s warmth as my body continued to readjust from the fae transformation. Every nerve ending felt raw, oversensitive, like I’d been struck by lightning and was still conducting electricity.

“The spirits,” I whispered, guilt beginning to creep through my exhaustion. “Did we just commit mass murder?”

“Those witches made their choice when they used blood magic,” Elias said firmly, his magic weaving gentle healing energy through our bond. “They killed an innocent person to fuel their attack. Those spirits... they were seeking justice.”

Through the mansion’s walls, I could still sense the lingering traces of what had happened outside. The Purity Front’s retreat had been complete and panicked, their carefully planned assault shattered by forces they hadn’t anticipated. But something else nagged at me, a wrongness I couldn’t quite identify.

“They found us too easily,” I said, struggling to focus through the magical fatigue clouding my thoughts. “The wards Lydia and Sorrel created were supposed to be unbreachable. How did they even locate this place?”

Atlas’s expression darkened, his protective instincts flaring despite his exhaustion. “Someone told them where to look.”

CHAPTER 19

WILD

I was too tired to think about the implications of Atlas's words. And so was everyone else. After using up all our energy to protect the mansion and put the dead back to sleep, all I could think about was getting some rest myself. Atlas helped Elias get me back to my room before he and Caden went to their own chamber. Elias stayed with me, helping me undress as I crawled into bed.

"You can't wear your jeans to bed," he huffed, pulling the blankets away from me. "It's unsanitary."

"I haven't been exactly rolling in the mud today," I groaned, reaching down and undoing the button at my waist. "I think you're just trying to get me naked." I leaned back, throwing a hand dramatically over my forehead. "And take advantage of my weakened state."

"I am not," he snapped, but I could see the red rising in his cheeks.

I just stared at him, a grin curling over my lips. After such a serious and frankly disturbing afternoon, I let myself give into the jokes. Something had to lighten the mood. I wasn't made for such *severity* all the time. I needed fun to survive.

"Oh no," I said, coughing lightly. "I don't think I have the strength to get these *pesky* jeans off. Whatever will I do?"

Elias rolled his eyes, but I could feel his amusement rippling through our bond despite his attempt at exasperation. "You're impossible," he muttered, but his hands were already moving to help me with my jeans.

The moment his fingers brushed against my skin as he worked the denim down my legs, a different kind of energy sparked between us. Not the overwhelming magical power we'd wielded earlier, but something softer, more intimate. Through our connection, I felt his breath catch as he took in the sight of me in just my tight briefs, exhausted but still very much affected by his touch.

"Better?" he asked, his voice rougher than it had been moments before.

"Much," I replied, catching his wrist as he started to pull away. "But I'm still feeling rather... vulnerable. Might need someone to keep an eye on me. Make sure I don't have any magical aftershocks or anything."

Elias's pulse jumped beneath my fingers, and through our bond I felt his desire war with his lingering nervousness. But something had shifted today. Seeing me in my true fae form, fighting alongside me, protecting each other... it had changed something fundamental between us.

"Magical aftershocks," he repeated, his brown eyes darkening as they met mine. "Is that a real thing?"

"Absolutely," I said solemnly, tugging him gently toward the bed. "Very serious condition. Requires close monitoring."

He let me pull him down beside me, his academic curiosity warring with growing arousal as I guided his hand to rest against my chest, right over my heart.

"Your heart is racing," he observed, his palm warm against my skin.

"Aftershocks," I confirmed, unable to suppress my grin. "Definitely need a healer's attention."

This time, when Elias leaned down to kiss me, there was something different in his touch. Less hesitation, more certainty. As if seeing me channel that wild fae magic, watching me protect all of us with everything I had, had finally convinced him that whatever this was between us was worth the risk.

"Will you lay with me?" I asked, the taste of him still on my lips. "I don't want to be alone after... everything."

Through our bond, I felt his answer before he spoke it. The walls he'd been carefully maintaining around his heart had cracked during the battle, and now tenderness flooded through our connection like warm honey.

"Of course," he whispered, already reaching for the buttons of his shirt. "I don't want to be alone either."

I watched through heavy-lidded eyes as he undressed, my exhaustion making everything feel dreamlike and soft around the edges. When he slipped into bed beside me, wearing only his boxers, the warmth of his skin against mine sent a shiver of contentment through our bond.

"Is this okay?" he asked, settling against me with careful consideration for my depleted state.

Instead of answering with words, I pushed back against him, getting as close as possible. I pulled his arms tight around me,

breathing in his scent. Through our connection, I felt his surprise at my sudden vulnerability, followed immediately by a fierce protectiveness that made my chest tight.

"You were incredible today," he murmured, his fingers curling gently through my hair. "The way you called the spirits, protected all of us... I've never seen magic like that."

"Scared you, didn't it?" I asked quietly, some of my old insecurities surfacing despite my exhaustion.

"Terrified me," he admitted honestly. "Not because of what you did, but because I realized how much I had to lose. How much you mean to me."

The words hit me like a physical blow, so much raw emotion packed into that simple admission. Through our bond, I could feel the truth of it, the depth of feeling he'd been holding back finally spilling over.

"Elias," I breathed, pulling back just enough to meet his eyes.

"I know we said we'd take things slow," he continued, his hand coming up to cup my face. "But after today, after nearly losing you... I don't want to waste any more time being afraid."

"What are you saying?" I asked, though I could feel the answer thrumming through our connection already.

"I'm saying I think I love you, Wild. Not because of soul recognition or magical bonds or cosmic destiny. Because you're brave and funny and fierce, and you make me feel alive in ways I never knew were possible."

The confession hung between us like a bridge neither of us had been brave enough to cross before. Through our bond, I felt his terror at putting himself out there so completely, but also his determination not to let fear rule him anymore.

"I think I might love you too," I whispered, the words feeling both foreign and completely natural on my tongue. "More than I thought I was capable of loving anyone."

He kissed the back of my neck and then buried his face in my hair. We didn't need to say more, not right now. Through the bond, I could feel everything I needed to know. He was telling the truth, his affection for me washing between us like a tidal wave. I allowed myself to be wrapped up in its warmth. Between that and his strong arms around me, I slipped into dreams without even realizing I'd fallen asleep.

When I woke, it was dark in the room. The ethereal servants had shut the blinds and doused the fire. There was nothing but the warmth of Elias pressed against my back and the sounds of his soft breathing filling the room. I leaned against him, a smile spreading over my face. Everything felt so… different. But *right*. Being close to Elias like this… it was where I belonged, what I wanted more than anything in the world. I didn't understand why it had taken me so long to realize it.

But as I snuggled against him, I noticed something else. Elias was rock hard, his cock nestled perfectly against my butt. A wave of lust rushed through me, filling my body with a strange but familiar tingling sensation. It was stronger than normal, much more than my usual hookups. This was lust, but not because I wanted to get off. It was lust with the intention of *making love*, and that was something I'd never experienced before.

I pushed my ass back against Elias, letting out a low moan as I felt his length press against me. My own cock was already hard, trapped by the tight fabric of my briefs. I wanted more than anything to reach down and set it free, to touch myself with Elias pressed up against me. But I knew Elias hadn't wanted to go that far just yet, and I'd never break his trust like that.

"You woke me up…" Elias whispered against my neck, his warm breath over my skin sending a shiver down my spine.

"S-Sorry," I whispered back, realizing my thoughts had crossed through our bond. "I just—"

"You were just thinking about my dick," he chuckled softly. His cock flexed against my ass, making my heart leap. "I was dreaming about *fucking* you."

My entire body lit up at his words, my cock throbbing against my briefs. "It feels like a pretty good dream," I grinned. I paused for a moment, gathering up my courage. "Do… Do you want to make it a reality?"

He buried his face in my neck, kissing and licking at my pulse point. "I thought you'd never ask."

Before I knew what was happening, Elias's hand had snaked around my hips and down the front of my underwear. His fingers wrapped around my cock, giving it a gentle squeeze that drew a moan from my lips.

"Are… Are you sure you want this?" I asked, still worried I was pushing him too fast, even though he was the one touching me.

"I'm sure," he replied, nibbling at my ear. "Are you?"

"Fuck yes…" I sighed, leaning into his touch. "Please fuck me, Elias. I… I *need* it."

His grip tightened around me, and I felt his other hand slide down to push my briefs lower on my hips. The satin sheets against my heated skin made me gasp, but it was nothing compared to the sensation of Elias's bare hand stroking me slowly, deliberately.

"I've been thinking about this," he murmured against my ear, his voice thick with desire. "About touching you like this, about being inside you. I just… I don't know if I'll be any good at it."

Through our connection, I could feel his arousal mixing with mine, creating a feedback loop that had us both trembling. His

cock was pressed firmly against my ass, only the thin fabric of his boxers separating us, and I could feel how badly he wanted to be closer.

"You'll be perfect," I breathed, reaching back to hook my fingers in the waistband of his underwear. "You'll feel everything I want through the bond. Just let me guide you."

He helped me push his boxers down, and then we were both naked, skin against skin, the heat between us almost overwhelming. I could feel his length sliding between my cheeks as he rocked against me, both of us moaning at the contact. His pre-cum smeared against my skin, the slickness only adding to the friction.

"I don't want to hurt you," he whispered, his magic already weaving gentle preparation spells around us. The sensation was unlike anything I'd ever experienced, warm and tingling as his magic relaxed my body. Not to mention the magical lube forming against my skin like morning dew. That was a nice touch.

"You won't," I assured him, turning in his arms so I could see his face in the dim light. His brown eyes were dark with want, but I could still see the care there, the tenderness that made my chest tight. "I trust you completely."

He kissed me then, slow and deep, pouring all his emotion into the connection between our lips. Through our bond, I felt his wonder at my trust, his determination to make this perfect for both of us.

"I love you," he whispered against my mouth, the words sending warmth cascading through our connection.

"I love you too," I replied, meaning it more than I'd ever meant anything in my life.

Reaching back, I grabbed a hold of Elias's thick cock, giving it a few strokes before pressing his crown against my entrance. The magical lube slicked us both up nicely and my body was already relaxed thanks to his preparatory spells. Holding him in place, I pushed back, a moan escaping my lips as my hole slowly stretched around him.

"Oh gods," Elias breathed against my neck, his voice trembling as he sank deeper into me. "That feels... *incredible*."

The sensation of him filling me was overwhelming, made more intense by the bond that allowed me to feel his pleasure alongside my own. Each inch of him that slid inside created a cascade of sensations that bounced between us, amplifying with every heartbeat. Now that he was inside me, he was thicker than I remembered. But I loved the stretch. It felt so… *perfect*.

"Take your time," I gasped, reaching back to grip his hip. "Let yourself feel everything."

His arms tightened around me, one hand splayed across my chest while the other curled possessively around my cock. When he was fully seated inside me, we both went still, adjusting to the intensity of our connection. Through our bond, I could feel his structured magic intertwining with my chaotic energy, creating something new and beautiful between us.

"Fuck, Wild," he whispered, the reverence in his voice making me shiver. "I… I didn't know it would be this… *good*."

I turned my head to capture his lips in a messy, awkward kiss. "It's never been this good for me, either."

When he began to move, it was with slow, careful thrusts that quickly became more confident as he felt my pleasure through our bond. Each stroke sent waves of sensation rippling through both of us, our magical signatures harmonizing in ways that made the very air around us shimmer with ethereal light.

"Faster," I encouraged, pushing back against him. "I won't break."

Elias responded by tightening his grip on my hip and increasing his pace, his cock hitting that perfect spot inside me that made stars burst behind my eyelids. He'd found it faster than anyone else ever had. His hand on my cock matched his rhythm, stroking me in time with his thrusts until I was babbling incoherently, lost in the dual pleasure of his touch and the bond between us.

"You're so fucking beautiful," he murmured, his lips tracing the curve of my neck. "So goddamn incredible."

The praise sent another surge of warmth through me, different from the physical pleasure but no less intense. Through our connection, I could feel how much he meant it, how in awe he was of me, of us together like this.

As our pace increased, I felt something shifting in our bond, a deepening connection that went beyond the physical. My fae nature responded instinctively, my body beginning to glow with an inner light as my true form emerged partially in response to the intensity of our joining.

"Elias," I gasped, feeling the change rippling through me. "It's happening… the bond—"

"I feel it," he breathed, his magic weaving through my chaotic energy in intricate patterns. "Don't fight it. Let it happen."

The sensation was overwhelming, like being unmade and remade simultaneously. As Elias continued to move inside me, his thrusts becoming more erratic as we both neared our climax, I felt my soul reaching for his across the barriers between us.

"I… I'm close," I gasped, feeling the coil of pleasure tightening in my core as our souls began to intertwine. "Elias, I can't—"

"Together," he whispered fiercely, his hand working my cock with desperate urgency. "Cum with me, Wild. Nothing else matters."

The moment his words registered, something inside me shattered. My climax hit like a tidal wave, pleasure crashing through every nerve ending as I spilled over his fingers and across the sheets. Through our connection, I felt Elias follow me over the edge, his seed buried deep inside me as his magic merged completely with mine.

But this wasn't just physical release. As we came together, I felt the final barriers between our souls dissolve completely. The soul recognition that had been building for days crystallized into something permanent and unbreakable. Golden light

erupted from both our bodies, so bright it illuminated the entire room like sunrise.

"Holy shit," Elias breathed against my neck, his body trembling as aftershocks rippled through both of us. "I can feel... everything. Your memories, your emotions, it's like we're—"

"One person," I finished, marveling at the completeness of our connection. Through the bond, I could access pieces of his consciousness as easily as my own thoughts. His magic flowed through me like a calming river, while my chaotic energy danced through his awareness like living flame.

We lay there panting, still connected physically and now joined magically. The golden light gradually faded, but the sense of completeness remained. I had never felt so whole in my entire life.

"The others," Elias murmured suddenly, his concern bleeding through our new connection. "Can they feel this too?"

"Probably," I chuckled, feeling his embarrassment. "Just like we could feel them."

Elias nodded, his breath still hot against my neck. "Well… now what do we do?"

"Nothing," I grinned, wiggling my butt back against him, his cock still buried to the hilt. "You cuddle me and we fall asleep. Then maybe we do it again when we wake up."

I felt his disbelief wash over me. "You want me to stay inside you while we sleep?" he asked incredulously.

"Why not?" I said, kissing the back of his hand. "Then if you get hard again, you can just fuck me."

Elias let out a long sigh, but he didn't pull out. In fact, he just pulled me tighter against him, making sure I couldn't escape. "You're so weird."

"But I'm *your* weird."

He chuckled softly. "I love you, Wild."

"I love you too, Elias."

CHAPTER 20

ELIAS

The morning light streaming through the windows felt different somehow, warmer and more golden than it had any right to be. I stirred slowly, immediately aware of Wild still pressed against my chest, my arm draped possessively across his waist. Through our newly completed bond, I could feel his contentment like a physical warmth spreading through my chest, mixed with a lazy arousal that made me smile against the pillow.

"Good morning, beautiful," I murmured against his neck, my voice rough with sleep and satisfaction.

Wild stretched languidly in my arms, a soft sound of pleasure escaping his lips as he pushed back against me. Through our bond, I felt his sleepy amusement at finding me hard again, pressed against the curve of his ass.

"Mmm, someone's eager this morning," he purred, his voice still thick with sleep but tinged with that familiar, playful edge. "Did you even get soft last night?"

Heat flooded my cheeks as my embarrassment tried to come to the surface, but I pushed it back. I wasn't going to give into those feelings anymore, not when Wild had asked me so earnestly to fall asleep inside him. But, sometime during the night, I must have slipped free. However, now I was rock hard again, nestled between his cheeks like I belonged there. Through our connection, I felt his satisfaction at my obvious desire, mixed with a tender affection that made my chest tight.

"I can't help it," I admitted, pressing a kiss to the sensitive spot where his neck met his shoulder. I ground my hard cock against his ass, savoring the friction. "Being this close to you, feeling everything you feel... it's intoxicating."

Wild turned in my arms, his green eyes bright with mischief and something deeper. In the morning light, I could see faint traces of his fae nature still lingering, a subtle luminescence to his skin, the way his hair seemed to catch light that wasn't quite there. The sight of him like this, rumpled and glowing and mine, sent a surge of possessive desire through our bond.

"We should probably get up," he said, though he made no move to leave the circle of my arms. "The others will be wondering if we survived the soul bonding process."

"Let them wonder," I growled, surprising myself with the confidence in my voice. "I'm not ready to share you with the world yet."

Wild's laugh was delighted, his pleasure at my protectiveness coursing through our connection. "Look at you, getting all territorial. I like this side of you, Elias."

Before I could respond, a sharp knock at our door made us both freeze. Through the bond, I felt Wild's spike of annoyance mixed with reluctant amusement.

"Guys?" Caden's voice came through the wood, carefully neutral but tinged with concern. "The house... it's different this morning. Everything's glowing, and we can feel—" He paused, and I could practically hear him blush through the door. "Well, we can feel that you're both alive and... *satisfied*."

Atlas's deeper voice joined in, gruff with what sounded suspiciously like amusement. "The tetrad bond has definitely evolved. We're getting a lot more sensory feedback than before."

Wild and I exchanged glances, both of us suddenly aware of how our completed soul bond might be affecting our connection to Caden and Atlas. Through our shared consciousness, I could sense the others more clearly than ever, Caden's gentle contentment mixed with curiosity, Atlas's protective satisfaction at knowing we were safe and happy.

"We'll be down in a few minutes," I called out, my voice steadier than I felt. "Just... give us a moment to get dressed."

"Take your time," Atlas replied, and I could practically hear the smirk in his voice. "But don't be too long. The ethereal servants have made some kind of magical breakfast feast that's hovering above the dining table."

As their footsteps retreated down the hall, Wild turned to face me fully, his eyes sparkling with amusement. "Well, that's going to be an interesting conversation."

"Do you think they felt... everything?" I asked, heat rising to my cheeks despite my newfound confidence.

Wild trailed his fingers down my chest, sending shivers through our connection. "Probably not the details, but definitely the intensity." His lips curved into a wicked smile. "Maybe they enjoyed the show through the bond."

The thought sent an unexpected jolt of arousal through me, which Wild clearly felt through our connection. His eyebrows shot up, and a delighted laugh escaped him.

"Elias Thorne! Are you getting turned on by the idea of Caden and Atlas feeling us through the bond?" He pressed closer, his body warm against mine. "That's deliciously kinky of you."

"I'm not—" I started to protest, then stopped as Wild's knowing look silenced me. Through our completed bond, there was no hiding the truth of my reactions. "Fine, maybe a little. It's just... different than I expected. Feeling them connected to us."

Wild's expression softened, his hand coming up to cup my face. "The tetrad bond is evolving. All four of us are becoming more... intertwined. It's natural to have complicated feelings about it."

I leaned into his touch, marveling at how easily he could read me now, how completely our souls had merged during the night. "I never thought I'd want this kind of connection with anyone, let alone three people."

"And yet here we are," Wild said softly. "Glowing and satisfied and completely tangled up in each other." He pressed a quick kiss to my lips before sliding out of bed, stretching lavishly in the morning light. He made sure to turn toward me, giving me the full view of his nudity. "Come on, let's go see what this magical breakfast is all about. I'm starving after last night's... activities."

I watched him move around the room, gathering clothes with casual grace, his naked body still bearing faint marks from our lovemaking. Through our bond, I could feel his awareness of my gaze, his pleasure at my appreciation. It was strange and wonderful, this constant feedback loop of emotions and sensations.

By the time we made it downstairs, dressed and somewhat presentable, I could feel Caden and Atlas waiting for us in the dining room. Their anticipation hummed through our tetrad connection, curiosity and affection mingled with something that felt almost like reverence.

Wild squeezed my hand reassuringly as we approached the doorway. "Ready to face the music?"

"As ready as I'll ever be," I replied, drawing strength from his confidence.

When we stepped into the dining room, I was momentarily stunned by the spectacle before us. The ethereal servants had outdone themselves. Platters of food hovered a few inches above the table's surface, glowing with different colored auras that corresponded to our tetrad energies. Fruits I'd never seen before glistened with morning dew, pastries steamed as if just pulled from an oven, and what looked like golden honey dripped upward in defiance of gravity.

But it was Caden and Atlas who truly captured my attention. They both seemed... transformed. Caden's normally pale skin had a subtle amber luminescence, tiny flowers blooming in his blonde hair only to dissolve moments later. Atlas's golden eyes were brighter than I'd ever seen them, crimson energy occasionally rippling beneath his skin like contained lightning.

"Holy shit," Wild breathed beside me, his grip on my hand tightening. "You guys look..."

"Different," Caden finished for him, a shy smile playing at his lips. "So do you."

I realized with a start that both Wild and I must be similarly changed. Through our bond, I could feel Wild's delight at the physical manifestation of our connection, his fae nature reveling in the magic made visible.

"The soul bond completion," Atlas said, his deep voice rumbling with something like awe. "It's affected all of us, not just you two."

"The tetrad is evolving," Caden added, gesturing for us to sit. "When you two... finalized things last night, it sent a wave of energy through the entire mansion. The ethereal servants say the wards are twice as strong now."

I slid into a chair across from them, Wild taking the seat beside me. Through our connection, I could feel all four of us adjusting to this new equilibrium, the bond between us humming with unprecedented clarity.

"So, you felt it?" Wild asked, reaching for a pastry that glowed with emerald light. "When we..."

"Not the details," Atlas assured us quickly, though a faint flush crept up his neck. "More like... an echo. Powerful emotions, sensations. It was..." He cleared his throat, looking to Caden for help.

"Beautiful," Caden said simply, his blue eyes earnest. "Like watching a storm from a distance. All that power and beauty but not being caught in the center of it."

Relief flooded through me, followed by a surprising surge of affection for both of them. Through our bond, I sensed similar feelings from Wild, along with his characteristic mischievous curiosity.

"So, you enjoyed the show?" Wild teased, biting into his pastry with exaggerated pleasure.

Atlas's laugh was unexpectedly warm. "Let's just say it was... educational."

The tension broke, all four of us dissolving into laughter that resonated through our bond, multiplying our shared mirth until tears streamed down my cheeks. The lightness of the moment felt miraculous after everything we'd been through, the attacks, the fear, the uncertainty. We needed the laughter.

"The bond feels different," I said once we'd composed ourselves, reaching for a blue-glowing fruit that tasted more delicious than anything I'd ever bitten into. "More... complete somehow."

"It's definitely stronger," Caden agreed, his fingers absently intertwining with Atlas's on the table. "I can feel all of you so much more clearly now. Your emotions, your magic... even your thoughts sometimes, though not in words exactly."

Atlas nodded, his golden eyes intense as he studied Wild and me. "The crimson journal mentioned this might happen. When

two members of a tetrad form a soul bond, it creates a kind of magical resonance that strengthens all connections within the group."

Wild's hand found my knee under the table, squeezing gently. Through our bond, I felt his curiosity mingled with a hint of nervousness. "So, what does this mean for all of us? Are we all supposed to form soul bonds now?"

The question hung in the air, charged with possibilities we'd only ever joked about. Through our connection, I could feel Caden's shy interest, Atlas's cautious consideration, and Wild's excitement.

"The journal wasn't specific about that," Atlas said carefully. "But it did say that each connection within a tetrad is unique. Some bonds might be primarily magical, others emotional or... physical."

"We don't have to decide anything right now," I said, feeling a bit out of my depth. "We're still figuring out what all of this means."

Caden smiled, reaching across the table to touch my hand briefly. The contact sent a pleasant trembling through our bond. "There's no rush. We have time to let things develop naturally, if they do at all."

"Speaking of time," Wild said, his tone shifting to something more serious. "We should probably talk about what happened yesterday. The attack."

The mood sobered immediately, all of us remembering the violence we'd unleashed, the spirits we'd called to defend ourselves. Through our strengthened bond, I could feel echoes of Wild's guilt about summoning up the dead, Atlas's fierce protectiveness, and Caden's quiet determination.

"Atlas, you said someone must have told the Purity Front where to find us," I said, meeting his golden eyes across the table. "What did you mean by that?"

Atlas's jaw tightened, crimson energy briefly flaring beneath his skin. "The wards on this place were created by two of the most powerful magical practitioners of their generation. They were designed to be undetectable, let alone penetrable. For the Purity Front to find us so quickly..."

"Someone had to have given them information," Caden finished, his expression troubled. "Someone who knew where the sanctuary was located."

"But who?" Wild asked, his free hand clenching into a fist on the table. "The only people who knew we were here are the Elder Council, the Dean, and Professor Blackwood."

"And your family," I added, glancing at Wild. "That's why they left that message for you."

"And," Atlas added. "They mentioned there were people in the Seelie Court that supported the Purity Front. Maybe even some in Briar Hall."

"You… You think my parents did this?" Wild asked, his fear palpable.

"No," I replied, grasping his hand and giving it a reassuring squeeze. "But that doesn't mean they weren't overheard." I looked up at him, seeing the worry crease around his eyes. "Is there someone in the Seelie Court that doesn't like you?"

Wild laughed, the sound lacking any sense of joy. "Uh, yeah. Lots of people don't like me, including my parents. And there are even more that think the fae should go back to their old ways of trickery and violence against the mortal world. That includes the witches they would steal power from."

"So… what do we do?" Caden asked.

"If there's a spy in Briar Hall feeding information to the Purity Front, I'm not sure there's much we can do from here." But then he paused, a grin curling over his lips. "Unless," he said, looking at each of us in turn, "we feed them the *wrong* information."

CHAPTER 21

WILD

"How are we going to feed them the wrong information?" Elias asked, clearly confused. "We're in the middle of the Veil, our wards are twice as strong as before, and I have no idea how to get back to Widdershins."

"We don't need to get back," I smiled. "We have the witch's glass, remember?"

"Is that what that crystal looking thing is?" Atlas said, lifting an eyebrow. "The one Councilor Vael pointed out?"

"Yep."

"But I thought it was only for emergencies?" Caden added. "She didn't make it sound like we could use it like a telephone or something. What if it breaks once we use it? Or it goes dark? If something goes wrong, we won't have a way to call for backup."

"We might not need to," I said, gesturing for all of them to follow me. They all stood up, keeping in step with me as I wound my way through the house. "If we can figure out a way to force the Purity Front to play their ace too early, we can stop them before they become too powerful. And after that last attack, they're already hurting."

"We *barely* kept them out," Elias retorted. "And we only managed to kill a couple of them. If they come back, they'll bring their strongest enchanted items and forbidden magicks. We won't stand a chance."

"That's the point," I said, leading our group down a winding corridor that seemed to shift subtly as we walked, the mansion responding to our intentions. "They'll bring everything they have, but to the wrong place at the wrong time."

Atlas's brow furrowed, his protective instincts flaring through our bond. "You want to set a trap?"

"Exactly." I grinned, feeling the familiar rush of chaotic energy that always accompanied my best schemes. "We send a message through the witch's glass to my parents, knowing full well it'll be intercepted by whoever's feeding information to the Purity Front."

We turned a corner and found ourselves in the entrance hall to the mansion. Against one wall stood the pedestal holding the same large crystal orb we'd seen upon arriving. It pulsed with gentle silver light. This was the witch's glass.

"And what would this message say?" Elias asked, his magic already analyzing the artifact as we approached. Through our bond, I could feel his mind working through the possibilities, calculating risks and advantages.

"That we're wounded and vulnerable," I said, stopping before the pedestal. "That the attack damaged the mansion's defenses beyond repair. That we're desperate for extraction. Maybe that the Elder Council has abandoned us."

"So we lie," Caden said, eyeing the witch's glass with apprehension. "We make them think we're easy targets."

"Better than that," I said, placing my hands on either side of the crystal without touching it. "We make them think they've already won."

The orb pulsed brighter as I leaned closer, responding to my fae energy. Through our bond, I could feel Elias's concern, his magic already calculating all the ways this plan could go catastrophically wrong.

"Wild," he said, stepping closer to me, "if we tell your parents we're vulnerable, and that information reaches the Purity Front, they'll come at us with everything they have. What happens if they break through our defenses for real this time?"

"They won't," I said with more confidence than I felt. "The soul bond has doubled the mansion's protections. And if we're prepared for them this time, we can do more than just drive them away."

Atlas crossed his arms, his golden eyes thoughtful. "We could eliminate a significant portion of their forces. Maybe even their leadership."

"Exactly," I nodded, flashing him an appreciative grin. "They think they caught us by surprise last time. This time, we'll be the ones doing the surprising."

Caden moved to stand beside Atlas, his gentle nature conflicting with the strategic necessity of what we were discussing. "I don't like the idea of luring people to their deaths, even if they are Purity Front."

"They killed innocent students," Atlas reminded him gently. "They sacrificed a human to power their attack against us. These aren't misguided activists, Caden. They're murderers."

I watched the conflict play across Caden's face, felt his struggle through our bond. His natural compassion warring with the harsh reality of our situation. Finally, he nodded, though the movement was stiff.

"You're right," he conceded. "I just wish there was another way."

"Wait," Elias said, moving to stand beside me at the witch's glass. "What if… What if *my* parents show up?"

The question hit me like a physical blow, my chaotic energy faltering as the implications sank in. Through our bond, I felt Elias's complex tangle of emotions. Fear, guilt, and a desperate hope that somehow his parents might be different than what we'd learned about them.

"Elias," I said softly, my hand finding his arm. "Your parents are part of the Purity Front. If they show up, it won't be to rescue you."

His magic flickered with distress, the careful control he maintained, wavering. "But what if they think I'm in real danger? What if some part of them still cares about me as their son?"

Atlas stepped forward, his protective instincts flaring through our bond. "Even if they do care, they've made their choice. They've chosen ideology over their own child."

"We can't risk it," Caden added gently, his growth magic reaching out to offer comfort through our connection. "If they arrive with the Purity Front forces, we have to be prepared to defend ourselves against them, too."

I watched Elias's face crumple slightly, the last vestiges of hope for his family's redemption dying in his eyes. Through our soul bond, I felt his grief as acutely as if it were my own. The sharp pain of accepting that the people who should have protected him had instead become his enemies.

"I know," he whispered, his voice barely audible. "I know they've made their choice. And I know they sent those people after us at the academy. It's just... they're still my parents."

I pulled him against me, letting our bond carry my love and support directly to his heart. "We'll face whatever comes together. All of us."

"We can give them a chance," Caden offered, placing his hand on Elias's shoulder. "We separate them from the rest and give them a choice. If they still choose the Purity Front… well…"

"Then we deal with them the same way we'd deal with anyone else," Atlas said, a tone of regret in his voice. "I'm not sure we have another choice, Elias."

The silence stretched between us, heavy with the weight of what we were contemplating. Through our bond, I could feel Elias wrestling with the reality of potentially having to fight his own parents, the people who had raised him and shaped his early understanding of magic and morality.

"Alright," he said finally, his voice steadier than I expected. "Let's do it. But we need to be smart about this."

I turned my attention back to the witch's glass, studying its crystalline surface. The artifact hummed with contained power, waiting for someone to activate its communication abilities. "So, what exactly do we tell them?"

"Make it believable," Atlas suggested, moving to stand behind us. "If whoever's spying for the Purity Front has been watching us, they'll know we're not completely helpless."

"But make us vulnerable enough to be worth the risk," Caden added, his tactical mind surprising me again. "They know they damaged our wards. Maybe tell them they are failing, that we're stuck here. And I like the bit about saying the Elder Council has abandoned us. That's a good touch."

Through our soul bond, I felt Elias's magic beginning to weave together the framework of our deception. "We could say the attack permanently damaged the wards," he said, his academic mind already crafting the lie. "That we're losing power daily and estimate we have maybe a week before the protections collapse entirely. That gives us a timeline and a sense of urgency for them."

"And that we're injured," I added, my fae nature reveling in the complexity of the deception we were weaving. "Maybe that one of us was seriously hurt in the fighting and needs medical attention we can't provide here."

"Who?" Atlas asked pragmatically. "The spy will want details."

I glanced around at my three bond mates, considering. "Me," I said finally. "I'll say I overextended my fae magic calling the spirits and now I'm... what? Magically depleted? Fading?"

"Magical burnout," Elias said immediately, recalling what Professor Blackwood had told us the day we first bonded. "Lead them to believe that our Resonance Stones have destabilized, that the tetrad bond is breaking down. They fear the tetrad the most, so if they think it's weak… well, it's impossible bait to resist."

"That's perfect," I nodded, feeling a surge of excitement through our bond. "The Resonance Stones destabilizing would explain why I'm supposedly fading. And if they believe the tetrad bond is collapsing, they'll think we're vulnerable individually."

Atlas's golden eyes gleamed with approval. "They'll throw everything they have at us if they think we're weakened and the tetrad is breaking. It's their one chance to eliminate the threat before we reach our full potential."

I placed my hands on either side of the witch's glass, feeling its cool surface hum with ancient magic. The crystal responded to my touch, its silvery glow intensifying until it cast eerie shadows across our faces.

"How exactly does this thing work?" I asked, glancing at Elias.

"It's a modified scrying crystal," he explained. "But instead of just viewing distant places, it allows communication. You need to focus on the recipient and channel your intent through the crystal." He paused for a moment, his brow furrowed. "But using it from a hidden plane like this one could stretch its magic to the limits. There's a very good chance it will crumble. So don't mess this up."

I took a deep breath, centering myself as I pictured my parents in their opulent chambers within the Seelie Court. Their disapproving faces formed in my mind's eye with painful clarity. I saw my mother's perfect posture as she sat at her vanity, and my father's perpetual frown as he reviewed court documents.

"Here goes nothing," I murmured, closing my eyes and channeling my fae magic into the witch's glass.

The crystal flared to life beneath my palms, pulsing with emerald energy that matched my magical signature. The surface clouded, then cleared to reveal an image of my mother's private sitting room, exactly as I'd pictured it. She sat alone, reading correspondence with the same detached expression she always wore when dealing with matters she considered beneath her.

"Mother," I called, my voice echoing strangely through the magical connection.

She startled, her perfect composure slipping for just a moment before her eyes found the magical projection that must have appeared before her. "Wilderain?" Her voice was cool, controlled, but I detected the faintest note of surprise. "This is unexpected."

"Mother, I need help," I said, letting my voice waver with carefully calculated weakness. Through our bond, I felt Elias's magic supporting my deception, helping me project exactly the right mix of desperation and fear. "The mansion is failing. The wards were damaged in an attack."

Her perfect eyebrows arched slightly, the only indication of her interest. "What attack? What do you mean?"

"The Purity Front found us," I continued, allowing my form in the projection to flicker slightly, as if my connection were unstable. "They nearly broke through. We managed to drive them back, but..." I paused, letting my image waver again for dramatic effect. "The Resonance Stones are destabilizing. The tetrad bond is breaking down."

That caught her attention fully. She set aside her correspondence, her eyes narrowing as she studied my projection. "The Resonance Stones are destabilizing? How is that possible?"

"I don't know," I said, letting my voice crack with desperation. "When the Purity Front attacked, I had to call on the dead in the river. I used too much power, Mother. I'm... I'm fading. The others are trying to hold the bond together, but without me..." I let the implication hang in the air, watching her carefully for any reaction.

For a moment, something that might have been concern flickered across her perfect features, so quickly I almost missed it. Then her mask of cool indifference slid back into place.

"Where are the Council members who brought you to this sanctuary?" she asked, her voice crisp and businesslike.

"Gone," I said bitterly. "They abandoned us here with promises to return, but we haven't heard from them since. The Elder Council has left us to die."

Through our bond, I felt Elias's approval at this embellishment. The more isolated we appeared, the more tempting a target we would be.

My mother's lips thinned slightly. "And what exactly do you expect me to do, Wilderain? You know your father and I cannot leave court during the Autumn Conclave. It is forbidden."

"Send help," I pleaded, making my projection flicker dramatically. "Anyone. The mansion's defenses are failing more each day. We estimate we have a week at most before the wards collapse completely. If the Purity Front returns before then..."

"I see," she said, studying her perfectly manicured nails with apparent disinterest. But I knew my mother well enough to recognize the calculating look in her eyes. She was weighing options, considering implications. "I will discuss this with your father. Perhaps the Seelie Court can spare some of their guard for the son of Briar Hall."

"Thank you," I whispered, allowing genuine relief to color my voice. The more convincing this performance, the more likely our trap would work. "Please hurry. I don't know how much longer I can maintain the bond."

With a final dramatic flicker, I withdrew my magic from the witch's glass, letting the connection dissolve. The crystal dimmed, its surface clouding over before returning to its normal silvery glow. I stepped back, suddenly exhausted from the effort of maintaining the deception.

"Well?" Atlas asked, his golden eyes intent on my face. "Do you think she bought it?"

I nodded slowly, collapsing into a nearby chair. "She bought it. Or at least, she's intrigued enough to investigate. My mother is many things, but she's not stupid. She'll want to verify what I told her."

"No offense, Wild," Caden said, shaking his head. "But your mother is cold as fuck."

"Yep," I sighed, giving him a half smirk. "That's just how she's always been. Fae in the Seelie Court aren't exactly known for being warm with their children."

"That conversation sounded like a business transaction," Elias observed, his voice tight with sympathy. Through our soul bond, I felt his horror at the coldness my mother had displayed, so different from his own parents' suffocating but genuine affection. "She didn't even ask if you were hurt."

“Because she doesn’t care,” I said simply, standing and brushing imaginary dust from my clothes. “The only reason she’ll act on this information is because it affects the family’s political standing. A dead son looks bad for their reputation.”

Atlas moved closer, his protective energy wrapping around all of us through the tetrad bond. “How long do you think we have before the message reaches the Purity Front?”

“Not long,” I replied, studying the now-dormant witch’s glass. “My mother will want to gather intelligence before making any moves. She’ll reach out to her contacts, ask careful questions. Within hours, whoever’s feeding information to the Purity Front will know everything I just told her.”

“And then?” Caden asked, though his expression suggested he already knew the answer.

“Then they’ll mobilize everything they have,” Elias said grimly. “If they believe the tetrad bond is failing and we’re trapped here with weakening defenses, they’ll see this as their best chance to eliminate us permanently.”

I felt a surge of satisfaction through our connection as the pieces of our trap clicked into place. “They’ll bring their strongest fighters, their most powerful artifacts. They won’t risk letting us escape or recover.”

“Which means we need to be ready for them,” Atlas said, his tactical mind already working through defensive positions. “We have a couple of days, if not mere hours, to prepare for this battle.”

“So, where do we start?” Elias asked.

“The training room,” Atlas nodded. “All of us. As much as we can.”

“Well,” I sighed, gesturing back into the house. “Lead the way, big guy.”

CHAPTER 22

ELIAS

"God damn I'm sore…" Wild grumbled as we practically crawled into the bedroom that night.

Atlas had put us through the wringer all afternoon with his training routine. I'd never done sports in school, but now I knew that I was definitely *not* cut out for it. I thought we'd just be practicing magic, but Atlas had us doing calisthenics, jogging, and a bunch of other stuff I'd never heard of. Either way, I felt like every limb I had was about to turn into jelly and fall off.

"I told you Atlas was serious about physical conditioning," I replied, stretching my arms above my head and wincing at the pull in my shoulders. Through our soul bond, I could feel Wild's exhaustion mirroring my own, along with a dull ache that seemed to radiate from every muscle in his body.

"Physical conditioning for what?" Wild groaned, flopping face-first onto the bed without bothering to undress. "We're witches and fae, not Olympic athletes. Our magic does the heavy lifting."

"Not when you're magically depleted," I said, repeating what Atlas had drilled into us during training. "If we exhaust our magical reserves in battle, we need to be able to fight physically. Or at least run away effectively."

Wild turned his head to glare at me from his position sprawled across the coverlet. "I hate it when you're logical."

Despite my own exhaustion, I couldn't help but smile at his petulant expression. Even covered in sweat and radiating soreness through our bond, he was still beautiful. The way the lamplight caught the copper highlights in his hair, the graceful line of his neck where it disappeared into his training shirt...

"Stop looking at me like that," Wild mumbled, though I felt a flutter of arousal through our connection despite his fatigue. "I can barely move, let alone do anything about the thoughts you're broadcasting."

Heat flooded my cheeks as I realized my appreciation was bleeding through our soul bond. "Sorry. I can't seem to control what gets through."

"Don't apologize," Wild said, rolling onto his back with a soft groan. "I like knowing what you're thinking. Even if my body feels like it's been trampled by a herd of centaurs."

I moved to sit on the edge of the bed, my hand finding his ankle and beginning to massage the tense muscles there. Wild's eyes fluttered closed, a sound of pleasure escaping his lips that went straight to my groin despite my own exhaustion.

"Better?" I asked, working my thumbs along his calf.

"Mmm," he hummed, his magic unconsciously reaching for mine through our bond. "Much better. Though I think I'm going to need a lot more of that."

Through our connection, I could feel exactly where his muscles were knotted, where the tension was worst. My magic responded instinctively, weaving gentle healing energy through my touch to ease his discomfort.

"Atlas wasn't kidding about tomorrow being worse," I said, continuing my massage as Wild melted beneath my hands. "He wants to start weapons training in the morning."

"Weapons?" Wild's eyes snapped open. "What kind of weapons?"

"Basic combat magic channeling, some defensive sword work, and something about a battleax." I moved my attention to his other leg, feeling his muscles relax under my ministrations. "He said a lot of stuff."

"Sword and battleax training?" Wild scoffed. "Can't we just get a gun or something? We're not living in medieval times."

"Guns don't work well with magic," I explained, my fingers working their way up to his thigh. "The gunpowder reacts unpredictably to magical energy. That's why most paranormal combat still uses traditional weapons."

Wild let out another groan, this one more dramatic than pained. "Of course it does. Why make things easy when we can swing around giant metal sticks instead?"

I couldn't help but laugh at his indignation. "I think it's more about focus. The weapons channel our magic, amplify it."

"I know," Wild sighed, reaching for my hand and pulling me up beside him on the bed. "I just hate that we have to prepare for this at all. A month ago, my biggest concern was whether I'd pass Blackwood's class without actually reading the

textbook."

Through our bond, I felt the undercurrent of his fear beneath the complaint. Not just fear for himself, but for all of us. For what we might have to do when the Purity Front arrived. The chaotic and carefree Wild I'd met that first day of class was long gone. This Wild was trying his damnedest to keep us all alive, and I could feel the stress eating him from the inside out.

"Come here," I murmured, pulling him against my chest despite our sweaty clothes and aching muscles. "We're going to be okay."

"You don't know that," Wild whispered, his usual bravado slipping to reveal the vulnerability beneath. "What if this plan backfires? What if they're stronger than we anticipate?"

I pressed a kiss to his forehead, trying to project confidence I didn't entirely feel. "Then we adapt. Together."

Wild was quiet for a moment, his fingers tracing patterns on my chest. Through our bond, I felt his thoughts shifting, focusing on something more immediate than our uncertain future.

"I have an idea," he said suddenly, pushing himself up to look at me with that familiar mischievous gleam in his eyes.

"Why do I feel like I'm about to regret asking what it is?"

"Because you're a stick-in-the-mud," Wild replied with a grin, though the affection flowing through our bond took any sting from the words. "But you'll like this one, I promise."

He sat up fully, wincing slightly at the movement, then began pulling his sweat-soaked shirt over his head. The sight of his bare torso, lean and muscled and scattered with those constellations of freckles I loved, momentarily distracted me from whatever he was planning.

"Eyes up here, lover boy," Wild teased, though I felt his pleasure at my appreciation. "I'm suggesting we take a bath. A real one, in that ridiculous tub we've been ignoring since we got here."

The image of Wild submerged in steaming water, his skin glistening wet, his hair darkened to deep copper, sent a jolt of desire through me that he definitely felt through our bond.

"See?" Wild smirked, already working on his pants. "Told you you'd like it."

The bathroom adjoining our bedroom was ridiculously opulent, with a massive marble tub that could easily fit four people, surrounded by floating candles that responded to magical energy. Despite my wealthy upbringing, I'd been intimidated by its grandeur since we'd arrived, but now the thought of sinking into hot water with Wild seemed like the perfect remedy for our aching muscles.

"That actually sounds amazing," I admitted, already imagining the relief it would bring to my protesting body.

Wild stood and stretched, his back arching in a way that made my mouth go dry despite my exhaustion. "Come on then. Let's see if this fancy mansion knows how to draw a proper bath."

The tub began filling the moment we entered the bathroom, steam rising from water that appeared to be the perfect temperature. The floating candles brightened in response to our presence, casting dancing shadows across the marble walls. Wild tested the water with his fingers, humming in approval.

"Definitely magic," he said, shedding the rest of his clothes without ceremony. "The temperature's perfect, and I think I smell lavender. Also, I have a feeling it doesn't get cold. Ever."

I followed his lead, though with considerably more self-consciousness despite everything we'd shared. It was strange how intimacy could coexist with nervousness, how I could still feel shy even after we'd bonded our souls together.

"Stop overthinking," Wild said softly, reading my emotions through our connection. He stepped into the tub with a sigh of pure bliss, sinking into the steaming water until it reached his chest. "Just feel."

The water was incredible, seeming to draw the tension from my muscles the moment I submerged myself. Wild moved to make room for me, and once I was settled, he placed himself between his legs with his back against his chest. Both of us groaned in relief as the magical water worked its healing properties. I couldn't help my cock stiffening against his lower back.

"This is definitely better than Atlas's torture routine," Wild murmured softly as my arms snaked around his waist beneath the water. "There definitely wasn't a dick pressed against me while were training."

"S-Sorry about that," I said, burying my face in his shoulder. "I can't help it when I'm around you."

"Don't ever apologize for cock," Wild replied, pushing back against me. "It's my second favorite thing in the whole world."

"What's the first?"

He turned over his shoulder, placing a kiss on my cheek. "You, of course."

"Gods…" I sighed. "How many guys have you gotten in bed with that line?"

"None that ever called me on it," he grinned. "Did it work?"

I laughed despite myself, the sound echoing off the bathroom walls. "It worked, but only because I'm already completely gone for you."

Wild's grin widened, and through our soul bond I felt his satisfaction at making me laugh, at pulling me out of my own head even when we were both exhausted and worried about what tomorrow would bring.

"Good," he said, settling back against my chest with a contented sigh. "Because I plan to keep using terrible pickup lines on

you for the rest of our very long lives."

The casual mention of our future together sent warmth spreading through my chest that had nothing to do with the heated water. Through our bond, I felt Wild's certainty about us, his commitment that ran deeper than his usual playful demeanor suggested.

"The rest of our lives, huh?" I murmured against his ear, my hands tracing idle patterns on his stomach beneath the water. "That's quite a commitment from someone who told me it was *just sex* not that long ago."

Wild tensed slightly in my arms, embarrassment and regret flickering through our connection. "I was scared," he admitted quietly. "I'd never felt anything like what I felt with you, and it terrified me. So I said what I thought would protect me."

I pressed a kiss to his shoulder, tasting water and the salt of his skin. "I know. I could feel it through the bond, even before it was completed. All that fear and longing tangled up together."

"And now?" he asked, turning his head to meet my eyes.

"Now I can feel how much you love me," I said simply. "Just like you can feel how completely I've fallen for you. No hiding anymore."

Wild's eyes softened, his magic reaching for mine through the water around us. The bathwater began to glow faintly with our combined energies, amber and emerald light swirling together in patterns that matched our synchronized breathing.

"This is nice," Wild murmured, relaxing fully against me as our magic danced together. "Just us, no training, no prophecies, no one trying to kill us."

"Mmm," I agreed, though I could feel his arousal building through our bond as my cock pressed more insistently against his back. The combination of the heated water, his naked body in my arms, and the intimate connection of our magic was affecting both of us despite our exhaustion.

"You know," Wild said conversationally, though his voice had dropped to that husky tone that always made my pulse race, "there are some very interesting things you can do in a magical bathtub."

"Such as?" I asked, though my hands were already moving of their own accord, skimming along his sides beneath the glowing water.

Instead of answering with words, Wild shifted in my arms, turning to straddle my lap so we were face to face. Water sloshed gently around us as he settled against me, our cocks pressing together beneath the surface.

"I mean," he said, grinding his equally hard cock against mine. "We're so wet… you might just accidentally slip inside me. Then what will I do? I suppose I'd just have to ride you slowly until you cum."

His bluntness made my breath catch, but my dick reacted by throbbing even harder. The idea of him slowly teasing me, *using* me as his personal pleasure toy, turned me on more than I could articulate.

"I... I think I'd like that," I managed to say, my voice barely more than a whisper as Wild shifted his hips in a slow, deliberate circle.

His smile was wicked as he reached between us, taking both our cocks in his hand and stroking them together. The sensation sent sparks of pleasure coursing through our bond, doubled and reflected back until I couldn't tell whose enjoyment was whose.

"You're sure?" he asked, his green eyes searching mine. "You're not too sore from training?"

I laughed softly, my hands finding his hips beneath the glowing water. "I think this might be the perfect remedy for sore muscles, actually."

Wild leaned forward to capture my lips in a deep kiss, his tongue sliding against mine as he continued to work our cocks together. Through our soul bond, I could feel his desire building alongside mine, the feedback loop of sensation making everything more intense.

"I need you inside me," he breathed against my mouth, his voice thick with want. "Right now."

He shifted his position, rising slightly in the water as he positioned himself over my cock. I felt my cockhead press against his entrance, which was already slick and ready. Apparently the magical bathwater had properties I hadn't anticipated, acting as a perfect lubricant.

"Wait," I gasped, sudden concern cutting through my desire. "Don't you need... preparation?"

Wild's laugh was breathy and full of heat. "Fae magic," he explained, sinking down just enough to take the head of my cock inside him. "I can relax my body at will. One of my many talents."

The tight heat enveloping me made stars burst behind my eyelids. I gripped his hips tighter, fighting the urge to thrust up into that exquisite pressure. Through our bond, I could feel Wild's pleasure at the stretch, the fullness, as he slowly lowered himself onto my length.

"Fuck," he moaned, his head falling back as he took me completely. "Damn, that cock is thick. I… I'd almost forgotten how perfectly you fit inside me, hitting all the right places..."

Water sloshed around us as he began to move, rising and falling in a slow, torturous rhythm that had both of us panting. The magical bathwater continued to glow with our combined energies, the light pulsing in time with our movements.

"Is this okay?" Wild asked, his hands braced on my shoulders as he rode me with deliberate slowness. "Not too much after

today's training?"

"It's perfect," I managed, my hands sliding up his back to pull him closer. "You're so tight and warm."

Through our connection, I could feel exactly what he wanted, what would bring him the most pleasure. I angled my hips slightly, thrusting up to meet him as he came down, and was rewarded with a broken moan as I hit that perfect spot inside him.

"There," he gasped, his fingers digging into my shoulders. "Right there."

The bathroom echoed with the sound of water splashing and our mingled moans. Our bond intensified every sensation, creating an intoxicating loop of pleasure that built with each movement. I could feel Wild's enjoyment of being filled, the delicious stretch and pressure, while he experienced my overwhelming pleasure at my cock being enveloped in his tight heat.

"I'm not going to last long," I warned, feeling pressure building at the base of my spine. The day's exhaustion somehow made everything more intense, more immediate.

"Me neither," Wild admitted, increasing his pace slightly. His cock bobbed between us, hard and leaking even underwater. "Touch me, Elias. Please."

I wrapped my hand around his length, stroking in time with his movements. The combination of sensations, my hand on his cock, my thickness inside him, had Wild trembling above me, his magic flaring visibly through his skin. Little emerald sparks danced across his freckles, illuminating the water around us.

"You're glowing," I whispered in awe, watching his fae nature emerge in response to our shared pleasure.

"Can't help it," he gasped, his rhythm faltering as he got closer to release. "You bring out the real me. I can't keep it back when I'm with you like this."

The admission sent another surge of arousal through me. Wild, who prided himself on maintaining his carefully crafted persona, was coming undone in my arms. Through our bond, I could feel his walls crumbling, every pretense stripped away until there was nothing left but raw, honest need.

"I love seeing you like this," I told him, thrusting up harder as I continued to stroke him. "Just for me."

"Only for you," he agreed, his eyes half-lidded with pleasure. "Never felt this with anyone else."

The surrounding water began to swirl with magical energy, responding to our heightened emotions. The candles floating around the tub flared brighter, casting Wild in golden light that made him look otherworldly and impossibly beautiful.

"I'm close," he warned, his movements becoming more erratic. "So close, Elias."

"Cum for me," I urged, tightening my grip on his cock. "Let go, Wild. I've got you."

His release hit suddenly, his body clenching around me as he cried out my name. Through our bond, I felt his pleasure crash over me like a tidal wave, triggering my own climax. I thrust up one final time, burying myself deep inside him as I came harder than I ever had before.

For a moment, we both froze, locked together in shared ecstasy as our magics intertwined visibly in the water. Then Wild collapsed against my chest, both of us panting and trembling in the aftermath.

"Holy shit," he breathed against my neck, his body still shuddering with aftershocks.

"Yeah," I agreed, unable to find better words.

The water continued to glow softly as we eased down from our high. I stayed firmly lodged inside him, his legs still wrapped around my waist. I kissed softly on his neck as his cool breath rolled over my wet skin.

"Damn," Wild whispered. "I don't know if I'm ever gonna get used to how good this feels. The end of summer orgy has nothing on this. Even that time when I took three satyrs at the same time wasn't this good."

"Three?!" I cried, leaning back to look him in the eye. "At the same time?!"

"One of them was in my mouth," he laughed. "I'm not that stretchy." He gave me a wink. "Not yet anyway."

CHAPTER 23

ELIAS

Atlas slammed me into the wall with such force that the entire training room seemed to shake, his golden eyes blazing with an intensity I'd never seen before. Across the room, Wild and Caden paused their own sparring session, their heads turning in unison at the sound of my back hitting the paneling.

"Focus, Elias," Atlas growled, his massive hands still pinning my shoulders. "If this were a real fight, you'd be dead three times over."

I nodded, trying to catch my breath. We'd been training for hours, and every muscle in my body screamed in protest. Atlas had insisted on hand-to-hand combat today, arguing that we couldn't always rely on our magic in battle. Easy for him to say. Werewolves had natural strength and agility that witches like me could only dream of.

"Sorry," I managed, wiping sweat from my brow. "I got distracted."

Atlas released me with a frustrated sigh. "Distraction gets you killed. The Purity Front won't give you time to gather your thoughts or plan your next move."

From across the room, Wild called out, "Maybe ease up a bit, Alpha boy. Some of us weren't born with supernatural muscles."

I felt Wild's concern flowing through our bond, a warm current of protective energy that made my chest tighten. Ever since we'd completed our soul bond two nights ago, his emotions had become as clear to me as my own, sometimes even overwhelming my thoughts.

Atlas turned toward Wild, his expression softening slightly. "If I go easy on you now, I might as well hand you over to the Purity Front myself."

"He's right," Caden said quietly, his dryad magic already weaving healing energy toward me. I felt the soreness in my shoulders ease as his power flowed through our tetrad connection. "We don't have much time left."

The reminder hung heavy in the air between us. Our trap was set, the message sent to Wild's mother with the deliberate intention of it being intercepted. We'd given the Purity Front exactly what they wanted. The illusion of weakness, of vulnerability, had been laid out plain for them to see. Now all we could do was prepare and wait for them to take the bait.

"Again," Atlas commanded, stepping back into a fighting stance. "This time, use your structured magic to anticipate my movements. Don't just react, *predict*."

I nodded, centering myself as I called upon my magic. Blue energy flickered around my hands as I focused on Atlas's stance, the subtle shifts in his weight that telegraphed his intentions. When he lunged, I was ready, sidestepping his attack and landing a glancing blow to his ribs.

"Better," he grunted, though I knew the hit had barely registered against his werewolf constitution.

Across the room, Wild and Caden had resumed their own training, though I could feel Wild's attention split between his sparring partner and me. His protectiveness flowed through our bond like a constant warm current, distracting despite my efforts to focus solely on Atlas's movements.

"You're still thinking too much," Atlas said, circling me like a predator. "Combat is about instinct, muscle memory. You have been trained to analyze everything, but sometimes you need to just act, to *feel* what's coming instead of figuring it out."

He feinted left, then struck right. This time I managed to block, though the impact sent vibrations up my arm that made my teeth rattle. Through our bond, I felt Wild's spike of alarm at my discomfort.

"Wild, stop broadcasting your worry," I called out, dodging another of Atlas's strikes. "It's making it harder to concentrate."

"Sorry," Wild replied, though I could still feel his emotions bleeding through our connection. "It's hard to watch you get pummeled without wanting to intervene."

"That's exactly the problem," Atlas said, landing a light tap on my shoulder that would have been a devastating blow in a real fight. "The four of us are so connected now that one person's distress affects everyone. In battle, that could be

catastrophic."

Caden paused in his defensive stance, his brow furrowed with concern. "How do we fix that? The bond isn't something we can just turn off."

"You learn to compartmentalize," Atlas explained, stepping back to address all of us. "Feel the connection, but don't let it overwhelm your individual focus. The bond should enhance your abilities, not cripple them."

Wild wiped sweat from his forehead, his copper hair darkened with exertion. "Easier said than done when every time Elias gets hurt, I feel like someone's punching me in the gut."

"Because you love him," Atlas said simply. "But love without discipline becomes a liability in combat. You need to trust that he can handle himself, even when he's in pain."

The words hit harder than any physical blow. Through our soul bond, I felt Wild's conflict, his desperate need to protect me warring with the logical understanding that his overprotectiveness could endanger all of us.

"Let's try something different," Caden suggested, moving to the center of the room. "We all need a break." Caden gestured for me to follow him to get a drink. "Just ten minutes."

Atlas considered this, his golden eyes thoughtful. "Fine," he huffed. "But no more."

Wild, however, didn't follow us. "You are being such a hard-ass," he said, stepping up to Atlas. "You're gonna work a knot into your tail with all that balled up stress you're holding onto."

"And you," Atlas said, leaning in close so his face was only inches from Wild's. "Since you have so much energy for arguing and jokes, you can spar with me now."

Wild's eyes widened as Atlas moved into his personal space, but the fae didn't back down. Through our bond, I felt a spike of nervous excitement from Wild that surprised me.

"Fine," Wild said, his emerald magic flickering across his skin like static electricity. "But don't expect me to fight like Elias. I don't play by your rules."

Atlas's lips curved into something between a smile and a snarl. "That's exactly what I'm counting on."

I moved to the edge of the room with Caden, both of us watching with nervous anticipation as Wild and Atlas squared off. They circled each other slowly, Atlas with his practiced fighter's stance and Wild with the fluid, unpredictable movements of his fae nature.

"This could get interesting," Caden murmured, handing me a water bottle.

I nodded, unable to tear my eyes away. Through our bond, I could feel Wild's chaotic energy building, his magic gathering just beneath his skin. Atlas was a formidable opponent. I knew that better than anyone after being thrown around the room by him all morning. But Wild's magic was fundamentally different from mine. Where I relied on structure and precision, Wild's power thrived in unpredictability. It meant that Atlas wouldn't have an easy time predicting his moves, and that made Wild far more dangerous than me.

Atlas moved first, lunging with werewolf speed that should have caught Wild off guard. But Wild wasn't there when Atlas's hand reached the space where he'd been standing. He'd somehow shifted three feet to the left, moving with a grace that seemed to bend the rules of physical space.

"Too slow, puppy," Wild taunted, his eyes sparkling with mischief.

Atlas growled, his eyes flashing gold as his werewolf nature rose closer to the surface. He attacked again, this time feinting before changing direction mid-lunge. Wild barely avoided the blow, Atlas's fingers grazing his shirt as he twisted away.

"Better," Wild acknowledged, his own movements becoming more focused.

The dance continued, each of them testing the other's defenses. Atlas had raw power and training on his side, but Wild moved like water, impossible to pin down. Through our bond, I could feel his exhilaration growing with each successful dodge, his confidence building as he realized he could hold his own.

Then Atlas changed tactics. Instead of pursuing Wild directly, he began to herd him, using quick, controlled movements to limit Wild's options for escape. I recognized the strategy since he'd used it on me earlier. But Wild seemed oblivious to the trap closing around him.

"Wild, he's boxing you in," I called out, unable to stop myself.

But my warning came too late. Wild backed up one step too many and found himself against the wall, Atlas advancing with predatory focus. In a flash, Atlas closed the distance, his massive form caging Wild against the paneling.

"Got you," Atlas growled, his face inches from Wild's.

I expected Wild to concede, to acknowledge defeat as I had done countless times that morning. Instead, something shifted in Wild's expression, a dangerous glint entering his green eyes.

"Do you?" Wild purred, his voice dropping to that husky tone that always sent shivers down my spine.

Through our bond, I felt a sudden surge of heat that had nothing to do with exertion. Wild's chaotic magic flared, but not defensively. Instead, it seemed to reach out toward Atlas, wrapping around the werewolf's energy in a way that made my breath catch.

Atlas froze, his golden eyes widening as he registered the change in Wild's scent, the shift in his magical signature. "Wild,

what are you—"

"You're so tense," Wild murmured, his hands coming up to rest against Atlas's chest. "All that control, all that restraint. Don't you ever want to just... let go?"

I felt Caden tense beside me, his own awareness of the sudden shift in energy crackling through our tetrad bond. This wasn't sparring anymore. This was something else entirely.

Atlas's breathing became labored, his werewolf instincts clearly responding to Wild's proximity to the fae magic that seemed to be calling to something primal within him. "This isn't... we're supposed to be training..."

"We are training," Wild said, his lips curving into a wicked smile. "Just try to resist me. Fight me off Atlas. You're so strong, it should be easy for you."

Before Atlas could respond, Wild's magic pulsed outward, a wave of pure desire that crashed through our tetrad bond like a tsunami. I gasped, nearly dropping my water bottle as the sensation hit me. Beside me, Caden made a choked sound, his magic flaring in response.

"Fuck," Atlas breathed, his control visibly fraying as Wild's power washed over him. His hands moved of their own accord, bracing against the wall on either side of Wild's head, effectively pinning the fae in place.

"That's more like it," Wild whispered, his eyes now glowing with that inner light that marked his true fae nature emerging. "I can feel how much you want this, Atlas. How much you've been holding back."

Through our bond, I could sense exactly what Wild was talking about. Atlas's desire was like a living thing, coiled tight with restraint but growing stronger by the second. And it wasn't just directed at Wild. I could feel threads of that same want reaching toward Caden and me, the tetrad bond amplifying and reflecting our growing arousal back and forth between us.

"Wild," Atlas growled, his voice rougher now, more animal than human. "You don't know what you're doing."

"Don't I?" Wild challenged, pressing himself more firmly against the wall, which had the effect of pressing his body more completely against Atlas's. "I can feel everything you're feeling through the bond. All of us can."

He was right. The tetrad connection was flooded with Atlas's barely restrained hunger, with Wild's deliberate provocation, with my desperate curiosity that had been eating away at my core for weeks.

"You said yourself that we should use our magic to bring our enemies to their knees." Another pulse of magic washed through the bond and Atlas, to my great surprise, dropped to his knees. "Sometimes doing it *literally* if we can."

Wild reached down, running his fingers over Atlas's stubbly cheek. The werewolf growled in response, his eyes flaring gold. I felt the wave of pleasure and happiness through the bond. If Atlas had been transformed at that moment, his tail would've been wagging.

"And here you are, on your knees for me like a good puppy," Wild grinned. "What do you want to do for me, pup?"

"A-Anything you ask," Atlas replied, his resistance fading in an instant. "Everything. I… I want to worship you."

Wild's grin widened as he patted Atlas on the cheek. "Good boy."

There was a brief moment where I felt Wild's mind connect with mine. He was looking for something, though I wasn't sure what. My thoughts were far too occupied with the idea of him and Atlas fucking and how hot that would be, how much I wanted to watch it. I didn't understand why I wanted to see it, but I didn't care. All I knew was that I wanted it to happen, almost *needed* it.

Then Wild did something I didn't expect, but also wasn't surprised about. He reached down, unzipped his pants, and pulled out his half hard cock, the thick head pressed against Atlas's nose.

"Suck it," Wild commanded. "Worship my cock like the good, *obedient* puppy you are."

CHAPTER 24

WILD

I wasn't really thinking when I cast the spell of desire over Atlas. I was just reacting, using whatever tricks I had to make sure that I won the fight. However, I was a bit surprised when he dropped to his knees on command, those gold eyes staring up at me full of lust and a sinful *need* to obey.

For a brief moment, I hesitated. This was Atlas, not Elias. The connection wasn't as strong, but it felt *necessary*, like this was something we'd been needing to do for a long time. I thought of Elias and what he might think of the entire situation. However, I could feel him through the bond, his eyes glued to Atlas on the floor and my tall fae form looming over him.

To my surprise, Elias wasn't exuding jealousy or fury. Instead, I felt his pants tighten as if they were my own, his cock thickening at the thought of Atlas and I fucking right there on the training room floor. I reached out through our connection, making doubly sure that this wasn't off the table for him. When I found no resistance from either him or Caden, I gave in.

Reaching down, I unzipped my pants and grabbed my half hard cock. It flopped free, coming to a stop only inches from Atlas's lips. I let a heartbeat pass, then two, my dick pulsing gently in front of him. His nostrils flared as he breathed in my scent, his eyes glowing gold.

"Suck it," I commanded, knowing my magic could never force Atlas to do something he didn't want to. "Worship my cock like the good, *obedient* puppy you are."

Atlas's hands trembled as they reached for me, his golden eyes never leaving mine as he leaned forward. The first touch of his tongue against my cock sent electricity through the tetrad bond, all four of us gasping in unison as the sensation ricocheted between us.

"Fuck," I breathed, my head falling back against the wall as Atlas took me deeper into his mouth. His technique was different from Elias's careful precision, rougher, more desperate, like he was trying to devour me completely.

Through our connection, I could feel Elias's arousal spiking as he watched, his magic weaving through mine in patterns of pure want. Beside him, Caden's breathing had become ragged, his dryad energy pulsing in time with Atlas's movements.

"That's it," I encouraged, my fingers threading through Atlas's dark hair. "Show me how badly you've wanted this."

Atlas groaned around my length, the vibration making my knees weak. His hands gripped my thighs, claws threatening to emerge as his werewolf nature responded to the dominance I was projecting through my fae magic.

The training room filled with the wet sounds of Atlas's worship, punctuated by soft gasps from Elias and Caden across the room. Through the bond, I could feel their own growing need, the way their bodies were responding to the raw sexuality playing out before them. A quick glance showed me they were both rock hard, their dicks visible through their jeans. I just gave them a wink and kept going.

"That's it," I cooed, still holding a fistful of Atlas's hair. "Good boy. Look at me while you suck that fat cock."

He did as I commanded, never breaking eye contact as he worked my shaft. I loved watching the way his cheeks expanded, my dick filling his mouth to the brim. He looked so cute with his lips stretched around my girth and his cheeks tinged pink with lust.

I could feel Atlas's submission through the bond, his need to please mixing with his natural dominance in a way that was intoxicating. His mouth was hot and wet around me, his tongue working expertly as he took me deeper with each bob of his head.

"Fuck, you look so good like this," I groaned, my hips starting to thrust gently into his mouth. "Such a good little Alpha, taking my cock so well."

The praise made Atlas moan around me, his golden eyes fluttering with pleasure. Through our connection, I felt his own arousal building, his cock straining against his training pants as he lost himself in the act of worshipping me.

Across the room, I heard Elias make a strangled sound. When I looked over, I saw him palming himself through his jeans, his brown eyes dark with want as he watched Atlas service me. Caden was pressed against the wall beside him, his magic crackling visibly across his skin.

"Don't just watch," I called out, my voice rough with pleasure. "Come here. Both of you."

Atlas pulled off me with a wet pop, his lips swollen and glistening. "Please," he panted, looking between me and the others. "I need... I need all of you."

The raw need in his voice sent another surge of desire through our bond. Elias and Caden approached slowly, their movements hesitant but their arousal unmistakable through our connection.

"What do you want, Atlas?" I asked, my hand still fisted in his hair. "Tell us what you need."

"I want to taste all of you," he said, his voice breaking slightly. "And I want... I want to feel you inside me. I've been thinking about it for weeks."

The admission sent shockwaves through all of us. I felt Elias's surprise mixing with his own desperate curiosity, Caden's gentle arousal building as he processed what Atlas was asking for.

"Strip," I commanded, my fae magic pulsing with authority. "All of you. Now. Atlas is going to suck us all."

The two of them moved as if in a trance, hands fumbling with zippers and buttons while Atlas remained kneeling before me, his golden eyes tracking every movement. The air in the training room grew thick with arousal and magic, all four of our energies intertwining in ways that made the very walls seem to pulse with desire.

Elias was the first to free his cock, already hard and leaking as he stepped closer. Through our soul bond, I felt his nervousness mixing with overwhelming want, his magic reaching out tentatively toward the chaotic energy I was projecting.

"That's it, beautiful," I encouraged, extending my hand toward him. "Come, let Atlas show you how good his mouth feels."

Caden followed suit, his pants pooling around his ankles as he approached with shy eagerness. His magic was flaring brighter now, responding to the sexual energy saturating our bond. Atlas's breathing grew more ragged as he took in the sight of all three of us, hard and ready for him.

"Please," Atlas whispered, his voice rough with need. "Let me taste you all."

I guided Elias closer first, watching as Atlas's mouth opened eagerly. The moment those lips wrapped around Elias's length, a sharp cry escaped my bonded mate, his pleasure flooding through our connection so intensely it made my own cock throb.

"Fuck, that's incredible," Elias gasped, his hands instinctively reaching for Atlas's hair, just as mine had. "His mouth is so hot."

Atlas worked Elias with the same desperate hunger he'd shown me, his tongue swirling around the head before taking him deeper. Through the tetrad bond, I could feel exactly what Elias was experiencing, the wet heat, the suction, the way Atlas's throat constricted around him.

"My turn," I said after a few moments, gently pulling Atlas away from Elias and toward my own aching cock. He switched between us eagerly, worshipping each of us in turn while Caden waited with growing anticipation.

When Atlas finally turned his attention to Caden, the dryad's knees nearly buckled at the first touch of that talented tongue. His magic flared so brightly it illuminated the entire room, flowers beginning to bloom from cracks in the stone walls as his power responded to the intense pleasure. I knew their reaction was strong because of their mated bond, but something about Atlas being Caden's familiar made it even more intense as their power and pleasure spilled through the tetrad bond.

"Gods, Atlas," Caden moaned, his usually gentle voice rough with need. "You're so fucking good at this."

We established a rhythm, Atlas moving between the three of us with increasing desperation, his own arousal evident in the way his hips ground against nothing as he serviced us. The training room filled with our combined moans and gasps, the sound echoing off the walls as our magic created a feedback loop of shared sensation.

"I need more," Atlas panted during a brief pause, looking up at us with wild golden eyes. "Please, I need one of you to fuck me. I can't take much more of this." He paused, glancing up at Caden. "Or maybe all of you should take turns fucking me." He nodded slowly, a smile coming to his lips. "Yeah. That's what I need."

"I think I should go first," Caden said, grabbing Atlas by the collar and hauling him to his feet. "I'm his mate, after all."

Atlas growled his approval, already yanking down his pants, his powerful body trembling with anticipation as his cock sprang free. Caden ran his hands over the sculpted muscles of Atlas's back, marveling at his mate and how beautiful he looked submitting to us all.

"Do you want me to go get some lube?" Elias asked, always the practical one, even when his cock was leaking pre-cum onto the floor.

"No need," Caden grinned. "I can make my own. Nature magic makes that part easy."

With a gesture from Caden, vines sprouted from the stone floor, their leaves glistening with a natural nectar that smelled like honey and wildflowers. The amber-eyed dryad smiled as he collected the sweet substance on his fingers, his magic ensuring it would provide perfect lubrication.

"Turn around," Caden commanded softly, his usual gentle demeanor taking on an edge of dominance that surprised all of us. "Hands against the wall."

Atlas obeyed without hesitation, bracing his muscular frame against the training room wall. The sight of him bent over, presenting himself so willingly, sent a fresh wave of arousal through our tetrad bond. His powerful shoulders flexed as Caden's

slick fingers began to prepare him, drawing low groans from the werewolf's throat.

"Fuck, Caden," Atlas panted, pushing back against the intrusion. "Don't tease me. I want you inside me *now*."

Through our connection, I could feel Atlas's desperation, his need to be filled and claimed. But I could also sense Caden's careful control, his determination to make this perfect for his mate despite the overwhelming lust coursing through all of us.

"Patience," Caden murmured, working a second finger into Atlas's tight heat. "I want you ready for me. For *all* of us."

CHAPTER 25

WILD

Elias moved to stand beside me, our shoulders brushing as we watched the intimate scene unfold. His hand found mine, our fingers intertwining as our soul bond pulsed with shared arousal. The sight of our friends preparing to make love was more erotic than anything I'd ever experienced.

"Have you ever watched before?" Elias whispered, his voice barely audible over Atlas's increasingly vocal responses to Caden's careful work.

"Not like this," I admitted, my cock throbbing as Caden added a third finger, stretching Atlas open with methodical precision. "Never with people I cared about."

Atlas's legs were trembling now, his powerful frame shaking with need as Caden's fingers found that perfect spot inside him. The werewolf's head fell forward against the wall, a broken moan escaping his lips.

"Please, Caden," he begged, his voice cracking with desperation. "I'm ready. I need your cock inside me."

Caden withdrew his fingers slowly, positioning himself behind his mate. The moment his cock pressed against Atlas's prepared entrance, all four of us held our breath. Through the tetrad bond, we could feel Atlas's anticipation, Caden's nervous excitement, and the overwhelming rightness of what was about to happen.

"I love you," Caden whispered, pushing forward slowly until just the head of his cock breached Atlas's tight ring of muscle.

Atlas's response was a wordless cry of pleasure that echoed through our bond, his submission mixing with Caden's gentle dominance in a way that made my knees weak. Inch by inch, Caden pushed himself deeper until he was fully seated inside his mate. At the same time, I felt Elias's hand reach over and begin stroking my cock absentmindedly. I let out a soft moan, slipping a hand down his ass and pressing my middle finger against his tight hole.

Elias gasped, leaning into my touch as my finger teased his entrance. Through our bond, I felt his pleasure spike, matching the rhythm of Caden's first slow thrusts into Atlas.

"Fuck, that's good," Atlas growled, his voice deeper than I'd ever heard it as Caden began to find his pace. "Harder, please."

Caden complied, his gentle nature giving way to something more primal as he gripped Atlas's hips and drove into him with increasing force. The sound of skin slapping against skin filled the training room, punctuated by Atlas's increasingly desperate moans.

"You two look so hot together," I murmured, slipping my finger deeper into Elias while continuing to stroke his cock. My mate shuddered against me, his magic flickering blue around us as his pleasure built. He'd never let me touch him like this before.

"I want to try that," Elias whispered, his eyes never leaving Caden and Atlas. "I want to fuck Atlas while you and Caden watch."

The request sent a jolt of arousal straight to my cock. "Are you sure?" I asked, though I could feel his certainty through our bond.

Instead of answering with words, Elias turned and kissed me deeply, his tongue sliding against mine as his hands tangled in my copper hair. Through our connection, I felt his need, his curiosity, his desire to experience everything the tetrad bond had to offer.

"Is that okay?" he breathed against my lips.

"Of course," I smiled, kissing him once more. "Let Caden finish first. Trust me, sloppy seconds are the *best*."

Elias's eyes widened at my words, a mix of shock and arousal pulsing through our bond. His cock twitched in my hand as he processed the deliciously filthy suggestion.

"Fuck," he whispered, his gaze returning to where Caden was now pounding into Atlas with abandon.

Atlas had completely surrendered, his powerful body accepting each thrust with hungry need. His muscles rippled under

sweat-slicked skin as Caden gripped his hips with surprising strength, driving into him with increasing urgency. Through our tetrad bond, I could feel their pleasure building toward a crescendo, their magic intertwining in bright amber and crimson patterns.

"I'm close," Caden gasped, his rhythm faltering as his climax approached. "Atlas, I—"

"Inside me," Atlas demanded, his voice a guttural growl. "I want to feel you cum inside me."

The raw need in his voice sent another wave of arousal crashing through our bond. Elias moaned softly beside me, leaning into my touch as my finger continued to work his tight entrance. His magic was pulsing in time with his heartbeat, blue energy flickering around us like static electricity.

Caden's climax hit suddenly, his dryad magic flaring so brightly it momentarily blinded us. Through our connection, I felt his release as if it were my own, the exquisite pressure, the pulsing pleasure, the overwhelming sense of rightness as he filled his mate. Atlas followed immediately, his untouched cock spurting thick ropes of cum against the wall as Caden continued to thrust through his orgasm.

"Holy shit," Elias breathed, his eyes wide with wonder as he watched our friends cum simultaneously.

For a moment, all four of us were locked in shared ecstasy, the tetrad bond amplifying and reflecting our pleasure until it was almost too intense to bear. Then Caden slowly withdrew, his cock slipping free with a wet sound that made my mouth water.

Atlas turned, his golden eyes still blazing with unspent hunger despite his recent release. "Next," he panted, his gaze finding Elias. "I want you now."

Elias swallowed hard, nervousness and excitement warring within him. I could feel his hesitation through our bond, his worry about his inexperience compared to the rest of us.

"Go on," I encouraged, pressing a kiss to his temple. "I'll guide you."

Caden moved aside, his body still trembling with aftershocks as he leaned against the wall beside Atlas. His magic was already weaving healing energy through our bond, soothing tired muscles even as it stoked the fires of our shared desire.

Elias approached Atlas with careful determination, his careful magic reaching out tentatively. Atlas turned back around, bracing himself against the wall once more, his powerful body still quivering with need.

"You don't have to be gentle," he said, pushing his ass out even more. "Just cum in me. That's all I want."

I grabbed Elias's throbbing cock, leading him forward. Reaching out, I slicked my hands with Caden's vines that were still oozing their natural lubricant. Smearing it over my mate's thick shaft, I pulled him toward Atlas until his cockhead was pressed against the werewolf's used hole, still dripping with Caden's cum.

"Give it to him," I whispered in Elias's ear. "Give him that big, beautiful cock of yours."

Elias pushed forward slowly, a sharp gasp escaping his lips as he felt Atlas's heat enveloping him. The werewolf's body was still slick and open from Caden's thorough preparation, welcoming Elias's length with eager acceptance.

"Oh gods," Elias moaned, his magic flickering wildly as sensation overwhelmed him. "He's so tight, even after... fuck, Atlas."

Through our soul bond, I felt everything Elias was experiencing, the perfect pressure, the wet heat, the way Atlas's muscles clenched around him. It was intoxicating, feeling my mate's pleasure layered over my own arousal as I watched him disappear inch by inch into Atlas's willing body.

"That's it," I encouraged, my hand sliding down to cup Elias's balls as he bottomed out. "Look how well he takes you. Such a good puppy, isn't he?"

Atlas whimpered at my words, his powerful frame shuddering as he adjusted to Elias's girth. "Move," he pleaded, pushing back desperately. "Please, I need you to fuck me."

Elias didn't need further encouragement. He pulled back until just the head of his cock remained inside, then thrust forward with more confidence than I'd ever felt from him. The wet sound of his entry, made slicker by Caden's release, filled the training room.

"Fuck yes," Atlas growled, his golden eyes rolling back as Elias found his rhythm. "Harder. Use me."

My mate's control snapped at those words. He gripped Atlas's hips with bruising force, driving into him with increasing intensity. Through our bond, I felt his amazement at his own boldness, his wonder at how natural this felt despite his inexperience.

Beside us, Caden watched with heavy-lidded eyes, his magic still pulsing with residual pleasure. His cock was already beginning to harden again, responding to the raw sexuality playing out before him.

"My turn next," I told Caden with a wicked grin, wrapping my hand around my own aching length. "I want to feel how tight Atlas gets after he's been fucked by both of you."

Caden's breath hitched at my words, his gentle nature warring with the primal hunger I could feel building through our tetrad connection. "I've… never seen him like this," he said as if he were in a dream. "But it feels so fucking good…"

"Then come over here and join us," I replied, beckoning him over. "Come watch your mate get bred by another man."

Caden moved closer, his eyes transfixed on the sight of Elias's cock sliding in and out of Atlas with increasing urgency.

The dryad's hand found my shoulder, steadying himself as waves of arousal crashed through our tetrad bond.

"He looks so beautiful like this," Caden whispered, his voice thick with wonder. "So completely lost in pleasure."

Atlas was indeed a sight to behold, his powerful werewolf frame trembling with each of Elias's thrusts, his golden eyes glazed with lust as he surrendered completely to the sensations. My structured mate had found his confidence, his careful control giving way to raw need as he claimed Atlas with increasing desperation.

"I'm getting close," Elias panted, his magic flickering blue around us as his climax approached. "Atlas, you feel so fucking good."

"Cum in me," Atlas demanded, his voice breaking with need. "Fill me up. I want to feel you both inside me when Wild takes his turn."

The filthy words sent a jolt straight to my cock. Through our soul bond, I felt Elias's pleasure spike as he drove into Atlas one final time, his release flooding the werewolf's already slick channel. The sensation of my mate's orgasm echoing through our connection nearly made my own knees buckle.

Atlas moaned as he felt Elias's seed joining Caden's inside him, his body clenching around my mate's softening length. When Elias finally withdrew, Atlas remained braced against the wall, his hole gaping slightly and dripping with the evidence of his thorough claiming.

"Perfect," I breathed, positioning myself behind him. "You look absolutely perfect like this, pup."

I didn't need any preparation. Atlas was already slick and open, his body eager to accept me. The first slide of my cock into his used heat drew gasps from all four of us, the sensation amplified and reflected through our tetrad bond until the very air seemed to shimmer with shared pleasure.

"Fuck, Wild," Atlas groaned, pushing back against me desperately. "You're so thick. I can feel everything."

I could feel it too. Not just my own pleasure, but the echoes of what Caden and Elias had experienced, layered together into something transcendent. This wasn't just sex anymore. Through our bond, our magic, our shared release, we were becoming something more unified than we'd ever been before.

As I began to move, establishing a rhythm that had Atlas crying out with each thrust, I glanced over and saw Caden and Elias, their tongues in one another's mouths as they stroked their cocks in time. Caden's free hand swirled in the air beside him, his magic weaving into something I didn't recognize. A moment later, I watched as the slick vines coming out of the floor curled up Atlas's legs. One wrapped around his cock and balls, one stroked his shaft, and the third slipped into his used up hole, the vine warm and slick against the underside of my cock as I fucked him.

The sensation of the vine sliding alongside my cock as I thrust into Atlas was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. The plant pulsed with Caden's dryad magic, warm and textured in ways that made my eyes roll back with pleasure. Through our tetrad bond, I could feel Atlas's overwhelming stimulation as he was filled and stroked simultaneously.

"Oh gods," Atlas whimpered, his powerful frame shaking as the vine around his cock began to pump in rhythm with my thrusts. "I can't... it's too much..."

"Yes, you can," I growled, gripping his hips tighter as I drove deeper. "Take it all, puppy. Show us how good you can be."

Beside us, Elias and Caden were lost in their own passion, hands roaming over each other's bodies as they kissed deeply. Through our soul bond, I felt Elias's wonder at how natural this all felt, how right it was to share this experience with all of us.

"I want to try something," Elias gasped, breaking away from Caden's lips. His magic began to weave complex patterns in the air, blue energy spiraling outward to connect with our other magical signatures.

The moment his spell took hold, the pleasure coursing through our tetrad bond intensified exponentially. Suddenly I could feel not just my own sensations, but everything Atlas was experiencing as if it were my own, the fullness, the stretch, the dual stimulation of my cock and Caden's vine. It was overwhelming and perfect, and I knew I wouldn't last much longer.

"Fuck, what did you do?" I panted, my rhythm faltering as waves of multiplied sensation crashed over me.

"Amplification spell," Elias managed, his own cock leaking steadily as he stroked himself. "Now we can all feel what Atlas feels."

Atlas let out a broken cry, his body convulsing as the magical feedback loop pushed him over the edge. His untouched orgasm triggered my own, my cum flooding his already used hole. Through our enhanced connection, I felt Caden and Elias follow us into climax. The training room filled with golden light as our combined magic erupted, all four of us lost in shared ecstasy that seemed to go on forever.

When the waves finally subsided, we collapsed in a tangle of sweaty limbs on the stone floor, breathing hard and trembling with aftershocks. The vine retreated slowly, leaving Atlas empty and thoroughly claimed as he curled against Caden's chest, his hole leaking our mixed seed.

"Well," I said eventually, my voice hoarse. "I think we can safely say our magical synchronization has improved."

Elias laughed breathlessly beside me, his arm tightening around my waist. "If this is what happens during training, I can't wait to see what we're capable of in actual battle."

I laughed with him, pulling him tight against my chest. "If we can't beat them, at least we can fuck like champs."

CHAPTER 26

ELIAS

I'm not sure if any of us slept that night. Each time I woke up, someone was either sucking my cock or riding it. The night was a haze of lust, magic, and the taste of cum. And when morning finally came, I was somehow more exhilarated and full of energy than I had ever been.

I slipped out of bed before the others stirred, careful not to wake the tangle of limbs and contentment that was my three mates. Through our bonds, I could feel their deep, satisfied sleep. Caden was curled against Wild's back, and Wild was sprawled across Atlas's chest, all of them radiating the kind of peace that only came after complete surrender.

The mansion seemed different this morning, warmer somehow. As if our magical joining had awakened something within its ancient walls. The ethereal servants glided past me with what I could have sworn were knowing smiles on their translucent faces. I made my way down to the kitchen, following the scent of fresh coffee and something sweet baking.

My body should have been exhausted after last night's activities, but instead I felt charged with power, my magic humming just beneath my skin. Each step I took sent little sparks of blue energy dancing across the floor, my magic responding to my heightened emotional state.

The kitchen was empty of people but full of activity, spoons stirring themselves in bowls, pastries rising in the oven without heat, fruits arranging themselves in artistic patterns on floating platters. I poured myself a cup of coffee from a pot that tipped obligingly in my direction and leaned against the counter, savoring the quiet moment.

"You're up early," came a voice from the doorway.

I turned to find one of the ethereal servants, the one who seemed oddly more substantial than the others, watching me with curious, silvery eyes.

"Couldn't sleep," I replied, taking a sip of my coffee. "Too much on my mind."

The servant drifted closer, its form shimmering like moonlight on water. "The mansion felt the tetrad's completion last night. All four points connected as one. It's been... a very long time since these walls witnessed a union between souls."

I felt heat rise to my cheeks, but there was no judgment in the servant's tone, only a kind of reverent wonder.

"Lydia?" I asked gently. "Her and the other two were the last ones here. I'm sure this place has been… *dead* without them."

The servant nodded. "Yes. This mansion has been quiet for many years. Some of the other servants started to fade, and I feared that I, too, would disappear with time. But you and your companions, you have brought life back to this place."

I smiled, hearing the relief in the servant's voice. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course, sir. Anything."

"Why are you so much more… I don't know… *put together* than the other servants?" I took another sip of my coffee. "Are you a homunculus or something more advanced? Or are you just older than the others?"

The servant's form flickered, becoming more solid for a moment before settling back into its usual translucent state. "I am... what remains of someone who once lived here. The others are true constructs, born from magic and purpose. But I was something else once, long ago."

My coffee cup paused halfway to my lips. "You're a ghost?"

"Not quite," the servant said with what might have been a smile. "When the mansion was created, certain *fragments* were bound to the mansion's foundations to keep it stable. We became guardians, caretakers, ensuring the sanctuary would never truly be empty." The being's silvery eyes grew distant. "I was Lydia's bond mate, her third in the triad at the beginning. When she and Sorrel left the mansion at last, I was bound to remain behind. But they visited now and then before they… passed on."

"Does… Does that mean—"

"Yes," the servant nodded. "I am a fragment of Thorne, the dryad bound to Lydia and Sorrel. And your family's namesake, I believe."

The coffee cup slipped from my nerveless fingers, clattering against the stone floor as the implications hit me like a physical blow. Through our bonds, I felt my mates stirring upstairs, my shock rippling through our connections and disturbing

their sleep.

"Thorne," I whispered, staring at the ethereal being with new understanding. "You… You've been here the whole time? Why didn't you say anything?"

"Because you needed to form your bond without my intervention," he replied. "I've made sure the house changes to meet your needs, kept the servants in line, and reinforced the wards when you were attacked the first time by the Purity Front."

"That was you?!" I scoffed. "I thought the house just did it on its own!"

He smiled and I swore I could just make out the green edges of his skin. "It was me. I wanted to be helpful and keep you on the path, but not become a crutch for you and the others to lean on. Forming a bond like yours isn't something I could teach you anyway. You had to find out for yourselves, to *want* it to happen without my intervention."

I sank into a chair, my mind reeling as I processed this revelation. The ethereal servant, Thorne, my grandmother's bond mate, moved to clean up the spilled coffee with a gesture, the liquid and ceramic shards floating obediently into the air before vanishing.

"You've been waiting for us for a long time, haven't you?" I asked.

Thorne nodded slowly. "It's been decades since Lydia and Sorrel left this place. And time in the Veil is… *strange*."

"I'm sorry," I said automatically.

"Don't be," he smiled. "This was my choice. I wanted to be part of the mansion, to be here to help whoever would come next to fulfil the prophecy Lydia told. We knew another celestial alignment would come eventually that brought a bonded triad back to the mansion. But I never expected there to be four of you."

"Yeah," I chuckled, unable to help myself. "We didn't expect that either. Atlas… well, he was sort of an accident."

Thorne's translucent form shifted, becoming momentarily more solid as he laughed, a sound like wind chimes and rustling leaves.

"There are no accidents in magic, young Elias. Only patterns we haven't yet recognized."

I felt the others stirring more insistently through our bonds now, their consciousness reaching for mine with sleepy curiosity. Wild's emerald energy was the most alert, already tinged with mischief and questions about where I'd gone.

"They're waking up," I said, glancing toward the ceiling.

"Yes," Thorne nodded, his silvery eyes crinkling at the corners. "I can feel them too, through the mansion's awareness. Your tetrad bond has strengthened the entire sanctuary. The walls themselves resonate with your connection."

"Will you tell them who you are?" I asked, already imagining Wild's reaction to discovering we had a dryad ghost watching over us, especially after last night's activities.

Thorne's form wavered slightly. "In time. For now, I believe you have more pressing matters to attend to. The trap you've set is already drawing attention. I've felt disturbances along the outer boundaries of the Veil."

My stomach tightened. "They're coming, aren't they? The Purity Front."

"Yes," Thorne confirmed, his expression growing solemn. "And they're bringing something powerful with them. Something that shouldn't exist in this realm."

Before I could ask what he meant, Wild's voice called down the hallway.

"Elias? Where are you hiding, beautiful?"

I turned toward the doorway just as Wild appeared, wearing nothing but a pair of borrowed sleep pants that hung low on his hips. His copper hair was deliciously disheveled, and faint marks from last night still decorated his neck and collarbone. Through our soul bond, I felt his pleasure at finding me, mixed with lingering satisfaction from our night together.

"There you are," he said, his green eyes brightening when he spotted me. "The bed got cold without you."

He paused, noticing the servant behind me. When I turned to face Thorne, his presence had diminished. Now he looked no different than the other servants. Without a word, he simply bowed and left the room.

"I… was getting coffee," I said, thinking of the cup I'd shattered all over the floor that I never got to drink. "And breakfast. I'm starving after last night."

"Me too," Wild smirked, walking over and wrapping his arms around my waist. He pulled me close, planting several kisses down my neck and collarbone. "Last night was… *wild*," he grinned.

"That was the worst pun I've ever heard," I groaned, though I couldn't help the smile that spread across my face. Through our bond, I felt Wild's satisfaction at my reaction, the playful energy that was so quintessentially him flowing between us.

"You love it," he replied, nipping at my earlobe. "And you love me."

"I do," I admitted, turning to face him fully. I cupped his face in my hands, struck once again by how beautiful he was in the morning light. "More than I ever thought possible."

Wild's expression softened, his usual mischief giving way to something more vulnerable. Through our soul bond, I felt the depth of his feelings, still new and overwhelming for someone who'd spent his life avoiding real connections.

"So," he said, glancing around the kitchen, "who were you talking to just now? That servant seemed... different."

I hesitated, uncertain whether to share what I'd just learned. Before I could decide, the sound of footsteps announced Atlas and Caden's arrival. They entered the kitchen together, both looking remarkably refreshed despite our activities the previous

night.

"Morning," Atlas rumbled, his golden eyes scanning the room with his usual protective vigilance. Through our tetrad bond, I felt his contentment mingled with a new openness that hadn't been there before.

Caden moved immediately to the coffee pot, which obligingly poured him a cup without being touched. "Did you sleep at all?" he asked me, his magic reaching out through our connection to check my well-being.

"Not much," I admitted, "but I feel... stronger somehow. Like our connection last night did more than just satisfy our physical needs."

Atlas nodded, leaning against the counter. "The tetrad bond feels different this morning. More stable. More complete."

"That's because it is," I said, making a split-second decision to share what I'd learned. "I just had a conversation with one of the ethereal servants. They let me know that the mansion is far stronger now that our bond is completed. Apparently our… *fuckfest* last night affected the house as well. The wards are stronger now." I paused, everyone nodding because they felt the strength of our connection too. "And they gave me a warning."

"A warning?" Atlas growled, his fierce protectiveness filling the bond. "What's wrong?"

"The Purity Front is coming," I said, watching as all three of their expressions hardened. "The servant said they've detected disturbances at the outer boundaries of the Veil. And apparently, they're bringing something with them… something that shouldn't exist in this realm."

Wild's playfulness vanished instantly, his emerald magic crackling across his skin. "Something that shouldn't exist? That could be anything from a demonic entity to a corrupted artifact."

"Whatever it is, it can't be good," Caden murmured, his blue eyes darkening with concern. "They must be desperate if they're willing to breach the laws of magical containment."

Atlas pushed away from the counter, his body tensing as if preparing for immediate battle. "How much time do we have?"

"I don't know," I admitted, running a hand through my hair. "The servant didn't say. But I get the feeling it's not long. They could be here today."

The kitchen fell silent as we all processed this information. Through our tetrad bond, I could feel each of their reactions. Wild's chaotic energy spiked with anticipation, Atlas's protective instincts flared like a shield around all of us, and Caden's steady resolve flowed like an underground river.

"Well," Wild finally said, a dangerous smile curling his lips, "at least we know our trap worked."

"That's one way of looking at it," Atlas grunted, though I detected a hint of admiration in his tone.

Caden moved to the window, peering out at the illusory misty seascape surrounding the mansion. "We should prepare. Last night's... activities... strengthened our bond, but we need to be ready for whatever they're bringing."

I nodded, my magic already categorizing potential threats and countermeasures. "The servant seemed genuinely concerned about whatever they're bringing. And if something worries a being that's been bound to this mansion for decades, we should take it seriously." I paused, taking a deep shaky breath. "I don't want last night to be our… to be our last."

All three of my bonded mates came to my side without hesitation. Wild was first, his arms wrapped around me so we were pressed skin to skin. Caden worked his way in next, his lips pressed to my neck affectionately. And Atlas was last, surrounding us all with his massive muscular arms.

"It won't be our last," Wild said. "That I can promise. We'll beat the Purity Front, or we'll escape with our lives. But I'm not letting anything happen to you, Elias. To *any* of you."

Warm agreement surged through the bond, filling me from head to toe. I felt tears come to my eyes as I felt not just Wild's love, but Caden and Atlas's too. I leaned into their touch, savoring the warmth surrounding me from all sides. All I'd ever wanted were friends, a chosen family I could call my own. And here I was with the most perfect men I'd ever met in my life.

My voice was barely a whisper when it finally escaped my lips.

"I love you all. *So* much."

CHAPTER 27

WILD

"The servant really had no idea what kind of artifact the Purity Front was bringing?" I asked, flipping through yet another book full of magical enchantments that could be a huge pain in the ass to deal with. "Any clues at all?"

Elias shook his head. "They didn't know. Only that it was powerful and it shouldn't be in the Veil." He gestured at the mansion surrounding us. "Then again, none of this should be in the Veil either. This is a realm only for the dead. For all we know, they could be bringing another house with them."

I paused in my reading, considering that possibility. The idea of the Purity Front bringing their own sanctuary into the Veil was both brilliant and terrifying. "That actually wouldn't be the worst idea," I said, closing the book with a frustrated sigh. "If they brought their own fortress, they could lay siege against us and just wait us out. They'd win eventually if they could block us from getting help."

"Lovely," Atlas muttered from where he was examining weapons that had materialized from the mansion's armory. "A magical fortress versus magical fortress battle. That's not ominous at all. It's like a bad Godzilla movie."

Caden looked up from his own research, amber magic flickering around his fingers as he traced protective ward diagrams in the air. "The real question is how they're powering whatever they're bringing. I doubt it's a house, but moving something that powerful into the Veil would require massive amounts of energy. Not to mention powering it up once they got here."

"Blood magic," Elias said quietly, his eyes dimming with distaste. "It's the only way they could generate that kind of power quickly. And we saw what they did last time. They're not above sacrificing their own to take us out."

The thought made my stomach turn. How many innocents had they sacrificed to fuel their assault on us? Through our bond, I felt the others' similar revulsion, our shared anger at the Purity Front's willingness to murder for their cause.

"Well, wherever the hell my mother's guards are, they're taking their sweet time getting here," I said, standing to stretch my back. We'd been researching for hours, and the floating breakfast platters had long since been replaced by an elaborate lunch spread that none of us had touched.

"Maybe they're not coming," Atlas suggested, not looking up from the enchanted blade he was testing. "Maybe your mother decided you're not worth the political risk."

I laughed, though there was no humor in it. "It's been three days, Atlas. I realized after day one that she's not sending them to rescue me. She's sending them to clean up the mess. Dead sons tell no tales, and all that."

The casual way I spoke about my mother's likely betrayal made Elias flinch through our bond. His parents might be part of the Purity Front, but at least they'd once loved him. Maybe they still did. But mine had always seen me as a political asset at best, a liability at worst.

"Then we prepare for the worst," Caden said, his gentle voice carrying steel underneath. "No rescue, no backup, just us against whatever they're bringing."

"Good thing we're fucking amazing together," I grinned, waggling my eyebrows at him.

Despite everything, Caden blushed, his dryad magic sparking with remembered pleasure from the night before. Through our tetrad bond, I felt Atlas's approval and Elias's fond exasperation at my inability to be serious for more than five minutes at a time.

"Speaking of which," Atlas said, finally setting down the weapon he'd been examining, "we should probably discuss tactics. If they're bringing something powerful enough to concern the mansion as a whole, we need to be ready for anything."

"Dispelling magic?" Elias offered. "That feels like a good place to start."

"Maybe we should learn some blood magic too," I countered. Everyone in the entire room turned to look at me at once, fear on their faces. I held up my hands. "I'm not saying we sacrifice one another or anything like that. I'm just saying maybe we should *learn* how blood magic works so we can disrupt their rituals."

"That's... actually not a bad idea," Elias admitted reluctantly, his mind already calculating possibilities. "If we understand the mechanics of their rituals, we might be able to create targeted counter-spells."

Atlas growled low in his throat, his golden eyes flashing with displeasure. “Blood magic isn’t something to mess with, Wild. Even researching it carries risks. Some things are hard to let go of once you know them. And some… are far too tempting.”

“I know that,” I said, trying to keep the frustration out of my voice. “But we’re already at a disadvantage. They know what they’re bringing and we’re just *guessing*. If we can at least recognize their ritual patterns, we might have a fighting chance. But right now, we’re sitting ducks.”

Caden set down his book and came to stand beside me, his nature magic reaching through our bond with calming energy. “There are some texts in the library that mention blood magic without actually teaching the practice itself. Maybe we could start there?”

Elias nodded, already moving toward one of the towering bookshelves. “I remember seeing something in the higher sections when we first arrived. A grimoire bound in white leather with silver clasps.”

“The one that hummed when you got near it?” I asked, following him through the stacks.

“That’s the one. It’s a defensive treatise on magical disruption. If I remember correctly, there’s an entire chapter on recognizing and countering sacrificial rituals.”

“How do you know that?” I asked, lifting an eyebrow.

Elias’s cheeks turned pink. “I… I might’ve snuck up here and thumbed through it in the middle of the night.”

“When?!”

“When we first got here,” he said, giving me a wink. “You’re a heavy sleeper.”

I shook my head in disbelief, following him as we wound our way through the labyrinth of bookshelves. I couldn’t help but marvel at his determination and how quickly we’d fallen into sync with each other. Even something as simple as navigating the library felt effortless, our movements coordinated through the tetrad bond without conscious thought. And Elias was always prepared, whether I knew it or not. I had to admire his hunger for knowledge and the skill it took to sneak around without a fae knowing. That was no small feat.

“Here,” Elias said, stopping before a locked glass case at the top floor. Inside sat a pristine white tome, its silver clasps gleaming despite the dust on the case itself. “The Grimoire of Countermeasures.”

“Fancy name,” I quipped, reaching for the case, only to jerk my hand back when it shocked me. “Ouch! Rude.”

“Let me,” Caden said, his dryad magic flowing like gentle water over the case. The lock clicked open without resistance. “The mansion recognizes my nature magic as non-threatening.”

“Are you saying I’m threatening?” I asked, mock-offended.

“Your fae magic is chaotic by nature,” Elias explained, carefully lifting the book from its resting place. “The grimoire is designed to maintain magical balance. It probably sensed your disruptive energy.”

“I’m not *disruptive*,” I protested, even as Atlas snorted behind me.

“Wild, you’re the definition of disruptive,” the werewolf said, his voice carrying a hint of fondness that softened the words.

The book opened easily in Elias’s hands, its pages rustling with an almost eager sound. The text was written in elegant script that seemed to shift and flow across the parchment, adapting to each reader’s comprehension level. I leaned closer, breathing in the scent of old magic and preserved knowledge.

“Chapter Seven,” Elias murmured, flipping through the pages. “Identification and Disruption of Sacrificial Magics.” He paused, his brown eyes scanning the text. “This is... comprehensive. Almost too comprehensive.”

Through our bond, I felt his unease as he read. The grimoire wasn’t just describing how to counter blood magic, it was explaining the fundamental principles behind it, the reasons it was so powerful, so seductive to those who sought quick results.

“What does it say?” Atlas asked, moving closer despite his earlier reservations.

“Blood magic draws its power from life force,” Elias read aloud. “The willing sacrifice of one’s own blood creates a minor enhancement, but the unwilling sacrifice of another’s life force...” He trailed off, his face pale.

“Creates exponential power,” I finished, remembering fragments from my fae education. “That’s why it’s forbidden in most realms. The temptation to escalate becomes overwhelming. With blood magic, almost anything is possible.”

Caden’s magic flickered with distress. “How many people do you think they’ve killed to power whatever they’re bringing?”

The question hung heavy in the air between us. Through our tetrad bond, I felt each of their reactions. Elias was filled with horror as he calculated possibilities, Atlas’s mind filled with a protective rage, and Caden’s was filled with gentle grief for the unknown victims.

“Enough,” Atlas said finally, his voice rough with controlled anger. “They’ve killed enough that we need to stop them permanently.”

“Look at this,” Elias said, pointing to a diagram in the grimoire. “A ritual circle designed to channel life force into an object. The more lives sacrificed, the more power the object can contain and channel.”

I studied the intricate pattern, my fae nature recognizing the twisted elegance of the design. “That’s not just any ritual circle. Those symbols around the perimeter, they’re containment runes. Whatever this empowers, the casters want to make sure it

doesn't explode in their faces."

"Smart," Caden observed, though his tone suggested he found the intelligence behind the ritual design unfortunate rather than admirable.

"Here," Elias continued, turning the page. "Disruption techniques. If we can break the ritual circle at specific points..." He traced his finger along the text. "The contained energy will backfire on the casters."

Atlas's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. "Turn their own weapon against them. That'll throw a wrench into their plans."

"It's not that simple," I warned, reading over Elias's shoulder. "We'd have to get close enough to the ritual site to physically break the circle. And if they're smart, they'll have it heavily guarded."

"Plus," Elias added, his voice troubled, "If they've already completed the ritual and powered up the item, which it's likely they have, there won't be anything to disrupt. The item would need to be destroyed, and I don't know how we're ever going to get that close. Once we're outside the wards, we'll have nothing to protect us."

"What if we could trick them?" I suggested, a sudden idea flaring to life in my mind. "We made them think the mansion's wards were failing when they're actually stronger than ever. What if we took them down and just… let them in?"

Three sets of eyes turned to face me, a look of shock and horror painted over their faces.

"Are you completely fucking insane?" Atlas growled, his golden eyes flashing with alarm. "You want to drop our only protection and invite them inside to kill us? We'd be sitting ducks!"

"Hear me out," I said quickly, raising my hands before he could launch into a full lecture. "The mansion's defenses aren't just the outer wards. Remember what that servant told Elias this morning? The house itself is stronger now because of our bond. What if the real trap isn't keeping them out, but letting them in where we control the environment?"

Through our tetrad connection, I felt Elias begin to analyze the possibility, his academic mind working through the logistics despite his initial horror. Caden's thoughts pulsed with nervous energy, while Atlas radiated pure protective fury.

"The mansion has been a sanctuary for decades," Elias said slowly, his voice thoughtful. "Every spell, every ward, every defensive enchantment has been building up in layers. If we could turn all of that inward..."

"We'd be trapped in here with them," Caden pointed out, his blue eyes wide with concern. "If something goes wrong, there'd be no escape."

"There's no escape anyway," I countered, gesturing toward the windows that showed the endless illusory seascape full of sunshine and clear waters. "We're already trapped here until someone opens a portal out. At least this way, we'd be fighting on our terms, in a place that responds to our magic."

Atlas began pacing, his werewolf instincts clearly agitated by the suggestion. "It's too dangerous. Too many variables. What if their artifact is powerful enough to corrupt the mansion itself?"

"Then we make sure it never gets the chance," I said, my fae nature thriving on the audacity of the plan. "We let them think they've won, let them get comfortable, and then we spring every trap this place has at once. There's gotta be something we can do."

Elias looked up from the grimoire, his brown eyes bright with sudden understanding. "The mansion's defensive systems aren't just protective, they're adaptive. If we could magically program them to recognize the Purity Front as a threat once they're inside..."

"The house would turn against them," Caden finished, his mind buzzing with excitement. "Every door, every hallway, every room could become a weapon."

Through our bond, I felt Atlas's reluctant consideration of the plan. His tactical mind was recognizing the strategic advantages even as his protective instincts rebelled against the risk. "It would have to be perfectly timed," he said finally. "One mistake and we'd all be dead."

"We're probably all dead anyway if we try to face them in open combat," I pointed out. "They won't arrive with anything less than their best. At least this way, we'd have a chance."

Elias closed the grimoire with a soft thud, his decision crystallizing through our soul bond. "Well," he said with a sigh. "We better get to work."

CHAPTER 28

ELIAS

The mansion resisted our efforts at first. Wards that had been in place for decades were not easily persuaded to let down their guard. Magic had a tendency to get *sticky* after a while.

"It's not working," Caden muttered, his magic pulsing against the stubborn barrier. Sweat beaded on his forehead as he pressed his palms flat against the wall. "The wards are rejecting my attempts to reprogram them."

I closed my eyes, feeling the mansion's defenses through my magical senses extending through the house. The protective spells were layered like geological strata, each one reinforcing the others in a complex tapestry of magical intent. Decades of enchantment had created something almost sentient in its resistance.

"We need to convince the mansion we're not trying to harm it," I said, opening my eyes to find the others watching me. "These wards were designed to protect, not attack. We're asking them to do something fundamentally against their nature."

Atlas growled in frustration, his golden eyes flashing. "We don't have time for magical therapy. The Purity Front could arrive any moment."

"You don't need to change the wards," Wild said. "Just flip their orientation."

"I know, Wild," I sighed, shaking my head. "Easier said than done. It's not as simple as flipping a switch. And they have to be undetectable until the Purity Front gets inside. I can't have them up at full power when they arrive. They'll know it's a trap."

Wild's eyes lit up with that familiar mischievous gleam that usually meant trouble. "What if we don't flip the wards at all? What if we create an entirely new layer?"

"Explain," Atlas said, his tactical mind already working through possibilities.

"The existing wards are designed to keep threats out," Wild continued, his chaotic energy beginning to dance across his skin. "But what if we weave a secondary system underneath them? Something that activates only when the outer wards are deliberately lowered?"

Through our soul bond, I felt his excitement building as the plan took shape in his mind. "A hidden trap layer," I murmured, understanding flooding through me. "The mansion would still feel protected because the original wards remain intact, just dormant."

"Exactly," Wild grinned. "We're not asking the house to become something it's not. We're just... giving it more options."

Caden's face flickered with renewed hope. "That could work. Nature magic is all about adaptation and growth. I could weave binding spells through the foundation itself, make them part of the mansion's natural magical ecosystem."

"And I could structure the activation triggers," I added, my mind already racing through the possibilities. "Specific magical signatures, number of intruders, hostile intent thresholds."

Atlas nodded slowly, his protective instincts finally aligning with the strategy. "Layered defenses. Let them think they've neutralized our protection while walking into a much more sophisticated trap."

"But we'll need something to power the new ward system," I said, the practical concerns asserting themselves. "This level of magical construction will drain our reserves completely. That's why this mansion took years to build. It's not something you just do on a whim."

But before anyone could reply, an ethereal servant materialized at the door.

"Sorry to interrupt," it said in a very flat tone. "The mansion's outer wards have been tripped. Somebody is coming."

"Is it the Purity Front?" I asked, fear creeping into my system and turning my blood cold.

"I don't have the information," it replied. "However, there are at least three dozen magical signatures on their way here now and one extremely powerful object of unknown origin or type."

"You three go," I said without letting myself think about it too much. "Go get everything ready. Make it look like the place has been abandoned and destroyed. I'll take care of the wards."

Wild furrowed his brows. "You said it would take a lot of power—"

"I know what I said, Wild!" I snapped. I saw the hurt on his face instantly and felt it through the bond, too, making it even

worse. I forced myself to take a deep breath. “I know,” I said again, gentler this time. “So, once I finish fixing the wards, I won’t have any power left to help with the rest of the house. That’s gonna be up to you guys. We might as well divide and conquer.”

Wild’s eyes narrowed, his emerald magic flaring with concern. “Elias, if you drain yourself completely, you’ll be defenseless when they arrive.”

“I won’t be completely drained,” I lied, knowing full well he could feel my deception through our soul bond. “Just... conserving energy.”

Atlas stepped forward, his massive frame blocking the doorway. “No. We’re not leaving you alone for this. There has to be another way.”

“There isn’t,” I insisted, my mind already calculating exactly how much of myself I’d need to pour into the wards. “We’re out of time and options. The mansion needs a complete rewiring of its defensive systems, and my structured magic is the only thing precise enough to create the kind of hidden triggers we need.”

Caden moved to my side, his hand reaching out to mine. “At least let me help. My nature magic could supplement yours, provide a foundation for your structured spells to build upon.”

I shook my head firmly. “The illusions need to be perfect, Caden. If they detect any flaw in our deception, the trap fails before it begins. Your magic is the only one delicate enough to create that level of detail.”

Wild crossed his arms, his freckled face set in stubborn lines. “I don’t like this.”

“None of us do,” I said softly, reaching out to touch his cheek. Through our bond, I let him feel my determination, my certainty that this was the only viable path. “But we knew this wasn’t going to be easy.”

Atlas growled low in his throat, but I could feel his tactical mind acknowledging the logic of my argument. “Twenty minutes,” he said finally. “That’s all you get. If you’re not done by then, we’re coming back for you, finished or not.”

I nodded, relief washing through me. “That should be enough time.”

Wild grabbed me suddenly, pulling me into a fierce kiss that sent sparks of emerald energy crackling between us. When he pulled back, his green eyes were fierce with emotion. “Don’t you dare burn yourself out completely. Promise me.”

“I promise to be careful,” I said, choosing my words deliberately.

He noticed the evasion, his eyes narrowing. “Elias—”

“Go,” I urged, gently pushing him toward the door. “Twenty minutes.” I grabbed him one last time, forcing him down into a kiss. “I love you, Wild. *So* much.”

“Don’t you dare say goodbye to me, Elias,” he murmured, the hurt and anger clear in his voice.

“I’m not,” I smiled, kissing him again. “I’m just telling you that I love you.” I pulled him into a hug, looking over his shoulder at the others. “I love all of you.”

Caden and Atlas moved in, joining the hug and placing kisses against my temples. Then, with visible reluctance, they left, each of them sending pulses of concern and affection through our bond as they disappeared down the corridor. The moment they were gone, I sagged against the wall, the weight of what I was about to attempt pressing down on me.

“I know that’s you,” I said to the seemingly normal ethereal spirit still standing in the doorway. “I could use some help, you know?”

The servant shimmered, and Thorne’s more detailed form took its place. And this time, he was more substantial than I’d seen him before. “You’re planning something foolish,” he observed, his silvery eyes studying me intently.

“Not foolish,” I said, shaking my head. “But something they won’t expect. We need an edge, or we won’t win this fight. This is our only choice.”

Thorne let out a long sigh. “I know. And that’s why I’m going to help you.”

“You really can help?” I asked, hope flaring in my chest despite my exhaustion. “I was sort of joking. What can you do?”

Thorne’s form solidified further, his dryad features becoming clearer as green energy pulsed beneath his translucent skin. “I told you I was bound to this mansion’s foundations. That binding goes both ways, which means I can channel power directly from the sanctuary’s core reserves in an emergency if needed.”

My eyes widened as I understood the implications. “Do you have enough power to restructure the ward yourself?”

“Not just power it,” Thorne said, moving closer. “I can help you weave the spells directly into the mansion’s existing framework. My connection to this place runs deeper than blood, deeper than bone. I am part of its magical architecture. With my help, it’ll be *much* easier to make adjustments.”

Relief flooded through me, though I tried not to let it show too clearly. “What do you need me to do?”

“Place your hands on the wall and open your magic completely. Don’t try to control or direct it, just let it flow. I’ll guide the patterns, you provide the precision.” His silvery eyes grew serious. “But there’s a chance the magic may consume what’s left of me completely.”

The weight of Thorne’s words hit me like a physical blow. Through our tetrad bond, I felt my mates’ distant concern as my shock rippled outward, but they were too far away and too focused on their own tasks to understand what was happening.

“You could die,” I said, staring at the ghostly dryad who had been silently protecting us since we arrived. “Actually die this

time. Completely."

Thorne's translucent features softened with something that might have been a smile. "I've been bound to this place for over sixty years, Elias, a mere shadow of what I once was. Watching, waiting, hoping that someday I might be useful again. If my existence can help protect you and your mates, then perhaps that's exactly what I was meant for."

"But Lydia, Sorrel... they wouldn't want you to sacrifice yourself for us," I protested, even as I felt precious time slipping away.

"Wouldn't they?" Thorne asked gently. "They spent their lives fighting the same darkness you face now. They built this sanctuary so that others like you could have a chance to survive, to grow strong enough to make a difference. What greater purpose could there be?"

I closed my eyes, feeling the mansion's magical framework humming around us, the layers of protection that had kept this place safe for decades. Through our bond, I sensed my mates working frantically to prepare their illusions, their magic painting scenes of destruction and abandonment throughout the house.

"There has to be another way," I said desperately.

"There isn't time to find one," Thorne replied, his form beginning to glow with concentrated dryad energy. "The Purity Front will be here within minutes. Either we do this now, or you face them with only the mansion's original defenses."

I knew he was right. The approaching magical signatures were growing stronger by the second, and I could begin to actually feel them. They had something else with them too, a dark, hungry presence that made my skin crawl. Whatever artifact they'd brought, it was powerful enough to make the very air around it feel wrong.

"Alright," I said, pressing my palms flat against the stone wall. "Tell me what to do."

Thorne moved behind me, his ghostly hands covering mine. The moment we made contact, his energy flowed into me like liquid starlight, cool and ancient and impossibly vast. I gasped as I felt the true scope of the mansion's magical framework, every ward and spell and protective enchantment laid bare to my consciousness.

"Now," Thorne whispered, his voice already growing fainter. "Let your magic flow. I'll weave it into the foundation." He leaned close, his ethereal form pressed into mine. "Remember, practice and rituals and rules can only go so far. This tetrad bond you share is rooted in *wild* magic. It responds to emotion and intention. Make them clear in your mind and let go of your structures. You won't need them anymore."

Gritting my teeth, I tried to push the hundreds of rituals and spells and diagrams I'd memorized over the years out of my mind. Instead, I replaced them with my emotions. I saw Wild's kind smile before he kissed me, felt Atlas's arms around my shoulders, and felt Caden's leg draped over mine as we read in the library. My love for them spilled forth, but none more powerfully than my devotion to Wild. Those green eyes, his ginger hair, and that mischievous smile he always wore drove me so mad I could barely think. I loved the chaos in his eyes, and I wanted to see them again, to protect them all. And that's exactly what I was going to do.

I opened myself completely, letting my magic pour out in streams of blue energy. But instead of depleting me as I'd expected, Thorne's power filled the gaps, his connection to the mansion itself providing an endless reservoir to draw from. Together, we began to weave new patterns into the existing wards.

The hidden trap layer took shape with breathtaking complexity. Where the original wards had been designed for simple protection, this new system was predatory in its elegance. Thorne guided my magic through pathways I'd never imagined, weaving spells that would lie dormant until triggered by specific combinations of hostile intent and magical signatures.

"Beautiful," Thorne breathed, his voice growing fainter as more of his essence poured into the work. "Your love for your mates creates such precise magical patterns. Lydia would have been impressed."

Through our connection, I could feel the mansion itself responding to our efforts. The ancient stones seemed to pulse with renewed purpose as the hidden defenses integrated seamlessly with the existing architecture. Doorways that would seal themselves, corridors that would rearrange their layout, rooms that would become prisons at a moment's notice.

"How much longer?" I asked, sweat beading on my forehead despite the cool energy flowing through me.

"Almost finished," Thorne replied, though his form was noticeably more translucent than before. "Just the activation triggers now. What conditions do you want to set?"

I thought quickly, my mind racing through tactical scenarios. "Multiple hostile magical signatures crossing the threshold simultaneously. Detection of blood magic artifacts. And..." I paused, considering. "If any of us are seriously injured or killed."

"A dead man's switch," Thorne nodded approvingly. "Clever. The mansion will avenge you even if you cannot."

The final threads of magic locked into place with an almost audible click. The surrounding walls hummed with barely contained power, ready to transform from sanctuary to death trap at a moment's notice. But when I turned to thank Thorne, my heart clenched.

The dryad's form was barely visible now, little more than a faint outline of silver light. He'd poured too much of himself into the spell, given too much to ensure our protection, just like he said.

"Thorne," I whispered, reaching out toward his fading presence.

"It was worth it," he said, his voice like wind through distant leaves. "Tell them... tell them I was proud to help. That the

sanctuary will remember what you've done here."

"I will," I promised, tears stinging my eyes as the last traces of his form dissolved into nothingness. I'd never gotten a chance to learn about him, or about his bond with Lydia and Sorrel. And now it was too late.

The silence that followed felt profound, weighted with loss and possibility in equal measure. But there was no time to grieve properly. Through our tetrad bond, I felt my mates' growing urgency as they put the finishing touches on their illusions.

I pushed myself away from the wall, surprised to find that I wasn't completely drained as I'd expected. Thorne's sacrifice had ensured that the ward restructuring drew from the mansion's own reserves rather than mine alone. I was tired, yes, but still functional. And as soon as my hand left the wall, I could no longer sense the magic of the mansion.

All its barely contained power had been suppressed. Now it felt like little more than a normal house, completely average and lifeless. The Purity Front would never sense the trap before it was sprung.

Elias, Wild's voice echoed through our soul bond, tight with concern. *The outer sensors are going crazy. They're here.*

Wiping my eyes, I headed down the hall to join my mates. The time had come to face our destiny.

CHAPTER 29

WILD

"We need to get out of sight," Caden said, his voice full of fear as Atlas grabbed him by the hand. "The Purity Front can't see us when they arrive. We have to hide our signatures."

"The second-floor gallery," Atlas said, heading toward the stairs. "It overlooks the foyer. We can stay behind the plants as they come inside. They'll never see us."

"You two go," I replied, standing to face the illusory wreckage of the mansion's front doors. "I'm not leaving without Elias."

"He can find us," Atlas urged. "Come on!"

"No." I stood my ground. "We go together or not at all."

I felt Elias's presence through our bond before I saw him, his magic a steady pulse that calmed my racing heart. He appeared from the eastern corridor, looking surprisingly composed for someone who'd just rewired an entire magical mansion's defense system.

"Wild," he breathed, relief flooding through our connection as our eyes met across the illusory debris.

"You're okay," I said, moving toward him without thinking. Our combined efforts had created a perfect scene of destruction, crumbling walls, shattered furniture, and scorch marks on the ceiling. But Elias navigated it effortlessly, knowing exactly which obstacles were real and which were mere projections.

"I told you I would be," he said, reaching for my hand. "We need to go. Now."

Atlas's growl of frustration echoed from the staircase. "Both of you, move your asses. They're at the outer boundary."

I pulled Elias close for a brief, desperate kiss before dragging him toward the stairs. Through our soul bond, I felt his exhaustion despite his brave face, the way his magic had been stretched thin by whatever he'd done with the wards. There was something else there too, a sharp grief that felt fresh and raw.

"What happened?" I whispered as we climbed.

"Later," he promised, squeezing my hand. "I'll tell you everything later."

The second-floor gallery was a long, narrow space lined with enchanted paintings on one side and massive potted plants on the other that overlooked the hall. Caden had encouraged them to grow wildly over the past few days. The foliage provided perfect cover while still allowing us to peer through the leaves at the grand entrance hall below.

Atlas pulled us behind a particularly massive fern, his golden eyes glowing in the dim light. "Kill your magical signatures," he hissed. "All of you. Not a spark."

We complied immediately, drawing our magic deep inside ourselves until we were practically invisible to magical detection. It was uncomfortable, like holding your breath underwater, but necessary. Through our tetrad bond, I could feel each of my mates doing the same, our presence in the magical world dimming to nothing.

"They're coming," Caden whispered, his blue eyes wide as he peered through the fronds.

The air at the mansion's entrance began to shimmer and distort. A tear appeared in reality itself, widening into a portal that pulsed with sickly purple light. Beyond the beautiful seascape illusion was the Veil, gray and depressing. But it was quickly blocked out. Through the portal stepped figures in hooded robes, their faces hidden in shadow.

"Holy shit," I breathed, counting as they entered. "There are so many of them."

At least thirty robed figures poured through the portal, moving with military precision as they secured the perimeter of the foyer. Their movements were coordinated and professional. These weren't amateur zealots, but trained fighters.

"So, this is what the Purity Front's elite looks like," Atlas growled. "Bunch of fucking cowards in those cloaking spells. It's almost like they *know* they're doing the wrong thing."

The last of the hooded figures entered, forming a protective circle around something they were escorting. A cold dread pooled in my stomach as the object finally emerged through the portal. It was a massive obsidian cube, roughly the size of a small car, floating several feet above the ground. Its surface rippled like liquid despite appearing solid, and faint red symbols

pulsed across its faces in hypnotic patterns. The artifact radiated wrongness, its magic twisting my stomach into knots.

Through our bond, I felt Elias's shock and recognition. "Blood magic," he breathed, so softly I barely heard him. "That's what they've been powering with sacrifices. But… what is it for?"

The hooded figures parted, and a tall figure stepped forward, removing his hood with deliberate slowness. Even from our hiding place, I could feel Elias's entire being freeze beside me, his emotions shutting down so completely it was like he'd disappeared from our bond.

"Elias's father," Caden whispered, his hand finding Elias's in the darkness.

The man below us surveyed the damaged foyer with cold satisfaction, his aristocratic features eerily similar to Elias's but devoid of any warmth. Behind him, several more figures removed their hoods, some human, others distinctly fae. I recognized at least three members of the Seelie Court among them, minor nobles who'd always sneered at my family's parties.

"The attack worked," Elias's father announced, his voice carrying easily through the hall. "The wards are down, just as our intelligence suggested. The tetrad bond has failed."

One of the fae stepped forward, her copper hair catching the light. "And my son?" she asked, her voice carrying no trace of maternal concern.

My heart stopped. "Mother," I hissed, instinctively shrinking further behind the foliage. Was she involved with the Purity Front? Had I asked for help from the wrong person?

"If he's alive, Lady Briar, we'll find him," Elias's father replied smoothly. "Though in his weakened state, he may not survive what comes next."

My mother nodded, her perfect features betraying nothing. "A pity. But necessary sacrifices must be made for the greater good."

Atlas's hand clamped down on my shoulder as rage surged through me. His grip was iron, keeping me from doing something stupid, like revealing our position. Through our bond, I felt his silent warning. *Not yet*.

"Begin the ritual," Elias's father commanded. "The Cube of Binding requires activation before we can proceed with the cleansing."

The hooded figures arranged themselves in a precise formation around the floating obsidian artifact. As they began chanting in unison, the symbols on the cube pulsed faster, bleeding from deep crimson to blinding scarlet.

"What the hell is that thing?" I whispered.

"It's a prison," Elias replied, his voice hollow. "A soul prison. They're going to trap us inside it, then use our power to fuel their revolution."

The blood drained from my face as the implications hit me. Through our tetrad bond, I felt the others' horror matching my own. We weren't just facing execution, they wanted to trap our souls and use us as an eternal power source.

"The ritual is nearly complete," one of the hooded figures announced, their voice muffled by the fabric. "The Cube has accepted the sacrificial offerings we provided."

My stomach turned as I realized what *sacrificial offerings* meant. How many innocent people had died to power that abomination floating in our foyer? Students from the academy? Random humans who'd been in the wrong place at the wrong time?

Through the leaves, I watched my mother examine the illusory damage with detached interest. "The destruction is quite thorough," she observed, running a gloved finger along a fake scorch mark on the wall. "Though I'm surprised they managed to damage the mansion this extensively before succumbing."

"Desperate creatures fight hardest when cornered," Elias's father replied, his cold gaze sweeping the room. "But their struggles only delayed the inevitable."

The chanting grew louder, more urgent. The cube began to spin slowly, its liquid surface rippling faster as the blood magic reached its crescendo. Red light poured from the symbols, casting everything in hellish shadows.

"Now," Elias's father commanded. "Activate the binding protocols."

One of the fae nobles stepped forward, pressing her hands against the cube's surface. The moment she made contact, the artifact pulsed with such intensity that I had to squeeze my eyes shut against the glare.

When I opened them again, tendrils of crimson energy were snaking out from the cube, searching the mansion like hungry serpents. They passed right through our illusions, seeking living magical signatures to ensnare.

"They're scanning for us," Atlas growled, his werewolf instincts screaming danger.

"Hold still," Elias whispered urgently. "Don't move, don't breathe, don't even think too loudly."

But it was too late. One of the energy tendrils paused directly below our hiding spot, its crimson glow intensifying as it locked onto our position. The cube's spinning accelerated, and several of the hooded figures turned their attention upward.

"Found them," my mother said with satisfaction, her emerald eyes finding mine through the foliage. "Hello, darling son. Did you really think you could hide from your own mother?"

I felt my blood run cold as my mother's emerald eyes locked with mine. She'd always been able to see through my illusions, even as a child. No matter how elaborate my magical pranks, she'd find me hiding behind them.

“Wild,” Elias whispered urgently, his magic flickering to life despite his attempts to suppress it. “Don’t react. It’s what they want.”

But it was too late. The crimson tendrils from the cube shot upward, tearing through Caden’s carefully crafted foliage like it was paper. The plants withered on contact, turning black and crumbling to ash.

“Run!” Atlas roared, shoving us toward the back of the gallery as the first tendril lashed toward us.

We scattered, abandoning stealth for speed as the crimson energy pursued us. Elias grabbed my hand, pulling me toward a hidden door behind a tapestry. Through our bond, I could feel his desperate plan forming: split up, divide their attention, make them work for each capture.

“The trap,” I gasped as we ran. “Elias, the wards—”

“Not yet,” he hissed, yanking me through the doorway into a narrow service corridor. “We need them to split up and follow us first. The mansion’ll have a better chance then.”

Behind us, I heard Caden cry out in pain, the sound echoing through our tetrad bond like a physical blow. Through our connection, I felt something cold and wrong trying to separate him from us, like fingers prying at the edges of our shared consciousness.

“They’ve got Caden,” I panted, terror gripping my heart as we sprinted down the corridor.

“Keep moving,” Elias commanded, his magic beginning to pulse around his hands. “Atlas will take care of him. Trust the plan.”

The mansion’s corridors twisted around us, responding subtly to Elias’s magic despite the apparent deactivation of the wards. Doors appeared where none had been before, hallways stretched impossibly long, and staircases spiraled in disorienting patterns.

“Where are we going?” I asked, struggling to keep up with Elias’s determined pace.

“The heart of the mansion,” he replied, his voice tight with concentration. “If we can reach the library, we can hide there while the house picks them off one by one.”

A shout echoed from behind us, followed by the sound of running footsteps. Through the bond, I felt Atlas’s fierce protective rage as he fought to free Caden. Their emotions were distant now, muffled by whatever the cube was doing to our connection.

“My son,” called my mother’s voice, eerily close despite the distance we’d covered. “Why make this more difficult than it needs to be? The Cube of Binding will take your soul, regardless. The only question is how much pain you’ll suffer first.”

“Charming woman, your mother,” Elias muttered as we rounded another corner.

“About as charming as your father,” I retorted.

Elias grinned despite the situation. “Who knew we had so much in common?”

Through the bond, I felt Caden finally break free, Atlas’s protective magic surrounding him as they ran deeper into the mansion.

Relief flooded through me as I felt our bond strengthen again, Atlas and Caden’s presence returning to full clarity. They were alive, unhurt, and moving toward the east wing, where the morning room would provide multiple escape routes.

“This way,” Elias said, pulling me down a spiral staircase that definitely hadn’t existed when we first arrived at the mansion. The stones beneath our feet pulsed with subtle magic, guiding us deeper into the house’s hidden passages.

Behind us, I could hear the Purity Front spreading out, their footsteps echoing through different corridors as they searched. Perfect. The more they dispersed, the easier it would be for the mansion to isolate and eliminate them.

“The library’s just ahead,” Elias whispered, pausing at a heavy oak door carved with protective runes. “Once we’re inside, I can activate the trap.”

But as he reached for the handle, the door exploded outward in a shower of splinters. Three hooded figures stood in the doorway, their faces hidden, but their magical signatures blazing with hostile intent.

“Found you,” one of them hissed, raising a wand that crackled with purple energy.

I reacted instinctively, my fae magic erupting in a chaotic burst that sent all three attackers flying backward. They hit the far wall with bone-crushing force, their bodies going limp as they slumped to the floor.

“Wild!” Elias gasped, staring at the unconscious forms. “How did you—”

“I don’t know,” I admitted, looking at my hands in shock. The magic had felt different, wilder than usual, and more natural than anything I’d ever done. “I just... reacted.”

Through our bond, I felt a pulse of approval from the house around us. The mansion was watching, waiting, ready to assist when needed. But it was still holding back, waiting for the right moment to spring its trap.

“Come on,” Elias said, tearing a large piece of splintered wood out of his arm. Blood flowed, but not enough to be a cause for concern. “We need to get into the library before—”

A scream echoed through the mansion, high and terrified. Not one of ours, but definitely human. Through the walls, I could hear shouting, confusion, the sound of running feet in multiple directions.

“What’s happening?” I asked.

Elias stood there, staring down at the wound on his arm. “The mansion,” he whispered. “It’s begun.”

CHAPTER 30

ELIAS

Screams filled the hallways, their echoes dying away as they reached the library. The Purity Front was trying to find us. But the mansion was finding *them* first. All of my careful magic woven into the wards activated at once, drawing on the power Thorne had sacrificed to make it all work. However, I was surprised by the cries of pain and terror reverberating through the house. I'd intended for the wards to destroy the intruders, but I hadn't thought much further than that. Hearing their deaths at the hands of my magic forced me to face the harsh reality of the situation.

It was kill or be killed.

Wild's hand found mine, his fingers intertwining with mine as another scream cut through the air, closer this time. Through our bond, I felt his complex emotions, satisfaction that our trap was working, but also a deep unease at the sounds of death echoing through what had been our sanctuary.

"I know," he said softly, reading my thoughts through our connection. "It's harder than you think it would be, isn't it? Even when they're trying to kill us."

I nodded, unable to speak past the tightness in my throat. The screams were becoming less frequent now, which meant the mansion was efficiently eliminating our attackers. My spell, woven into every stone and beam thanks to Thorne, was methodically hunting down the Purity Front members who had scattered throughout the house.

Through our tetrad bond, I felt Atlas and Caden moving through the east wing, their emotions a mixture of grim determination and shared horror as they witnessed the mansion's deadly work. They watched as a door sealed shut behind a group of robed figures, trapping them in a room that was slowly filling with poisonous gas. The next corridor had become a maze, its walls closing in on the remaining pursuers until…

"Stop," I whispered, pressing my hands against my temples. "I don't want to see anymore…"

Wild pulled me against his chest, his warmth grounding me as the psychic feedback of multiple deaths crashed through my magical senses. "It's not your fault," he murmured into my hair. "They came here to murder us, to trap our souls in that thing. You're protecting us."

But even as he spoke, I could feel something else through the mansion's awareness. My father was still alive, still moving through the house with purpose. And he wasn't alone. Several of the strongest Purity Front members had stayed close to the Cube of Binding, using its power to shield themselves from the mansion's attacks.

"The cube," I gasped, realization hitting me like a physical blow. "It's protecting them. The blood magic is strong enough to resist the mansion's defenses."

Wild's emerald eyes widened with understanding. "How many are left?"

I closed my eyes, extending my consciousness through the house's magical framework. The mansion's awareness showed me everything, empty corridors littered with bodies, rooms that had become death traps, and the main foyer where a cluster of survivors huddled around their floating prison.

"Eight," I said, opening my eyes to meet Wild's worried gaze. "Including both our parents. They're keeping close to the cube."

As if summoned by my words, my father's voice echoed through the mansion's walls, magically amplified to reach every corner of the house.

"Clever, my son," he called out, his tone carrying grudging respect. "Very clever indeed. But did you really think a few animated walls could stop the righteous fury of the Purity Front?"

Wild's grip on my hand tightened as my father's voice reverberated through the library walls. "Righteous fury," he spat. "Is that what he calls murdering innocent people to power that monstrosity? And for what? Because they don't want mixed marriages or something? Fucking prick."

Through the mansion's awareness, I could see my father standing beside the obsidian cube, his aristocratic features twisted with cold determination. The remaining Purity Front members formed a protective circle around the artifact, their combined

magical shields creating a barrier that even the house couldn't penetrate.

"They're trying to draw us back to them," I whispered. "The mansion can't get to them with the cube's protection. It won't be able to finish them off or drive them away." I glanced up at Wild. "Not without help."

Wild's eyes blazed with emerald fire, his chaotic magic crackling across his skin. "Then let's give them the help they need."

"Wild, no," I said quickly, grabbing his arm as he started to move toward the library door. "That's exactly what they want. The cube needs proximity to living magical beings to complete its binding ritual. If we get too close—"

"What other choice do we have, Elias?" he said, rounding on me in an instant. "We can't just sit here and do nothing! They killed innocent people… students like us, over this dumb idea that our realms should be kept separate." He grabbed my arms, pulling me close. "If we don't stop them now, more people will die. I don't think I can live with that on my conscience, can you?"

I stared at him for a long moment, surprised by the passion burning through our bond. "I… I don't want to lose you, Wild. I don't know if I'd survive it…"

"You're not going to lose anyone," he said, fierce determination burning in his eyes. "But if we don't try to stop these people… well, then we're going to lose everything and then some."

"Even if you have to kill your mother?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

"Yes," Wild nodded. "Even her."

"I… I don't know if I can kill my father," I replied, shaking my head. "I'm not sure I have the strength. I'm not like Caden… my father wasn't bad to me. He was harsh, but not cruel. He taught me almost everything I know…"

Wild put his hands on either side of my face, holding my gaze. "I will… *try* not to kill him, Elias. But you know as well as I do, if he survives and the Elder Council gets a hold of him… well, that's it. There won't be anything we can do to stop them."

I closed my eyes, feeling the weight of Wild's words settle over me like a shroud. He was right, of course. My father's survival would mean the eventual destruction of everything we'd fought to protect. Through our tetrad bond, I could feel Atlas and Caden approaching the library, their footsteps careful but determined as they navigated the mansion's transformed corridors.

"Alright," I whispered, opening my eyes to meet Wild's emerald gaze. "But we do this together. All four of us."

The library door opened silently as Atlas and Caden slipped inside, both of them looking grim but unharmed. Atlas's golden eyes swept the room, his protective instincts flaring as he took in our tense conversation.

"The mansion's work is done," he reported quietly. "Twenty-two bodies in the corridors. Whatever you built into those wards, Elias, it was thorough."

"Too thorough," I murmured, guilt twisting in my stomach.

"No," Caden said firmly, his gentle voice carrying unexpected steel. "They came here with a soul prison, planning to trap us for eternity. They got exactly what they deserved."

Through our bond, I felt the half-dryad's absolute certainty, his nature magic singing with the fury of a forest defending itself against wildfire. The contrast with his usual gentle demeanor was startling.

"The survivors are still clustered around that cube," Atlas continued. "Eight of them, including both your parents. They're chanting something, and the artifact is responding. Whatever ritual they're performing, it's building toward something big."

As if to emphasize his point, the mansion shuddered around us, books falling from their shelves as a wave of corrupted magic pulsed through the walls. The cube's influence was growing stronger, pushing back against the house's defenses.

"We don't have much time," Atlas said, looking at each of us in turn. "We need to end this. *Now*."

"So, what's the plan?" Wild asked, his magic crackling beneath his skin like static electricity. "We can't just walk up to them and ask nicely for them to stop their evil ritual."

I closed my eyes, feeling the mansion's awareness flowing through me. The wards Thorne and I had created were still active, still hunting, but they couldn't penetrate the protective bubble surrounding the cube. Something about the blood magic was creating a barrier that even our most powerful spells couldn't breach.

"The cube is the key," I said, opening my eyes as inspiration struck. "If we can disrupt its power source, the protection will fail, and the mansion can finish what we started."

Atlas's golden eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "How do we disrupt something powered by blood magic? It's not like we can unplug it."

"Actually," Caden said quietly, "we might be able to." His magic flickered as he stepped forward, a determined expression on his gentle face. "Blood magic requires constant feeding. If we can interfere with the flow of power between the sacrifices and the cube..."

"We can starve it," Wild finished, his emerald eyes lighting up. "Cut off its food supply."

I nodded slowly, my mind already mapping the possibilities. "The grimoire mentioned disruption points in ritual circles. The energy is stored within the cube already, but the cube itself is the ritual, the binding holding all the souls there. We'd have to be right on top of it to dispel the magic. And it would probably take some time…"

"Which means someone has to get close enough to touch the cube while the rest of us keep the Purity Front busy," Atlas said, his tactical mind already working through the logistics.

Through our tetrad bond, I felt each of their immediate reactions. Wild's reckless determination to volunteer, Caden's quiet courage warring with his protective instincts, and Atlas's absolute refusal to let any of us face that kind of danger alone.

"I'll do it," I said before anyone else could speak. "My magic is the most precise. I can dispel the binding ritual faster than—"

"No," Wild interrupted, his emerald eyes blazing. "Absolutely not. You're the one they want most, Elias. The moment you get within range of that thing, it'll try to suck your soul right out of your body."

"He's right," Caden added, his face twisting with concern. "The cube is designed to target powerful magical bloodlines. Your family's legacy makes you the perfect fuel for their ritual."

Atlas stepped forward, his massive frame radiating protective energy. "I should be the one to approach it. Werewolves don't have natural magic beyond our healing and shifting abilities. It won't recognize me as a target, but through our bond, you can work your magic."

"And what happens when my father realizes what you're doing?" I asked, shaking my head. "He'll kill you before you get within ten feet of that thing."

The mansion shuddered again, more violently this time. Dust rained from the ceiling as another pulse of corrupted magic rippled through the walls. Whatever ritual my father was performing, it was accelerating.

"We're running out of time," Wild said urgently. "The cube's getting stronger. I can feel it pushing against the house's defenses."

Through the mansion's awareness, I watched my father raise his hands above the floating artifact, his voice rising in an ancient chant that made my skin crawl. The obsidian surface rippled faster, its red symbols blazing like miniature suns. Cracks formed along the surface as the magic ached to be set free.

"By the gods…" I whispered, realization flooding through me. "I know how to destroy it."

Everyone stared at me, waiting for an explanation.

"The cube is already so massively powered by souls that it seems almost unstable," I explained. "Even now, it's starting to crack, and the magic is becoming erratic." I looked to Wild. "But *where* is the mansion located?"

Wild furrowed his brows. "It's in the Veil. You know that—" He stopped. "Oh my god…"

Realization spread through the bond as everyone caught on at once.

"The Veil is full of souls," I said, my grin spreading wide. "All we have to do is move it out of the house while it's still activated. It'll suck up so much energy that it'll destroy itself. Teleportation magic with our bond should be easy. We won't have to get that close, either. And when it explodes… well, the mansion should protect us."

"Elias…" Wild whispered. "You're a mad genius…"

He moved to wrap his arms around me, his smile wide. But before he could reach me, there was a bright flash of emerald light. The light slammed into Wild's back, sending him crashing into a bookshelf. My heart stopped as I watched his body crumple to the floor, books raining down around him.

"Wild!" I screamed, lunging toward him.

"I wouldn't, darling," came a cold, familiar voice from the library doorway.

Wild's mother stood there, her perfect features arranged in a mask of aristocratic disdain. Her hand still glowed with the remnants of the spell she'd cast at her own son. Somehow, she'd snuck up on us without anyone noticing, not even the mansion itself.

"Mother," Wild groaned from the floor, pushing himself up on shaking arms. Blood trickled from a cut on his forehead, but through our bond, I could feel he wasn't seriously injured. However, his magical signature was dangerously low. Her spell hadn't just hit him, it had drained his power in an instant. "I always knew you'd stab me in the back someday. Just didn't think you'd be so literal about it."

Lady Briar's emerald eyes, so much like Wild's, yet utterly devoid of his warmth, surveyed the library with cold calculation. "Wilderain, you've always been such a disappointment. Wasting your potential on... this." Her gaze flicked dismissively over the rest of us.

"How did you find us?" Atlas growled, moving to stand protectively in front of Caden.

"The mansion may have its tricks," she replied, stepping fully into the room, "but a mother always knows where to find her child. Especially when that child is so magically *inept*."

Wild laughed harshly, staggering to his feet. "Inept? Is that what you call surviving your little death squad? Look around, Mother. Your friends are decorating the hallways now."

A flicker of something like anger or respect crossed her perfect features before disappearing. "A temporary setback. The Cube is nearly ready. Time to go."

Through our bond, I felt Wild's pain and betrayal, buried beneath layers of defiance. I reached for him through our connection, sending waves of support and love to bolster his strength.

“I’m not going anywhere with you,” Wild spat.

In another flash of emerald light, Lady Briar disappeared. In less than a heartbeat, she was standing next to Wild, her clawed hands wrapped around his neck.

“I’m afraid you don’t have a choice, my dear,” she growled.

Another burst of green light and they were both gone, the space where they’d been standing covered in a smattering of autumn leaves. I stared at the spot, my heart sinking.

Wild was gone. She’d taken him from me.

CHAPTER 31

ELIAS

Wild was gone. My heart ached as the word echoed through my mind. Gone. *Gone*. Taken by his own mother to be sacrificed for her and my father's disgusting ideals.

Through our soul bond, I could still feel him. He was alive, angry, and terrified all at once. The connection stretched thin like a thread about to snap, but it was there. Wild was in the foyer with the others, held by magic far stronger than he could fight without our help. But something was stopping him from using the tetrad bond, something I'd never felt before.

"We have to move now," Atlas growled, his golden eyes flashing with protective fury. "They'll use him to power that thing."

My hands trembled as I tried to focus through the panic threatening to overwhelm me. "The plan… we can still make the plan work."

"How?" Caden asked, his gentle voice strained with worry. "We need all four of us to teleport something that powerful out of the mansion."

"We… We have to do *something*!" I barked, rounding on them both. "We can't just leave him to be killed!"

"Elias," Atlas said, taking a step forward. "I'm not going to leave him behind. But we have to move. They know where we are. We're gonna save him, but we need a minute to figure it out."

"What if he doesn't have a minute?" I sobbed, gesturing back toward the library door blown open by Lady Briar. "What if they're torturing him? What if they *kill* him?!"

As if in answer to my desperate questions, a scream tore through the mansion. *Wild's* scream. The sound ripped through our bond like a serrated blade, sending me to my knees as his pain became my own.

"They're hurting him," I gasped, clutching at my chest where our soul bond burned like fire for just a moment before dulling again. "We need to go now."

Atlas moved with startling speed, pulling me to my feet while Caden gathered his magic around us like a shield.

"Then we go," Atlas said, his voice deadly calm. "But not blindly. Not without a plan."

"What fucking plan could we possibly have that they haven't thought of?" I cried. "We don't have time to stand around here and try to figure it out. The cube is blocking the mansion's magic. So even if they kill one of us, the dead man's switch won't activate."

Caden's brows furrowed. "You… You put a failsafe in your spell?"

"I… I did," I said at last, realizing I'd never told them about my insurance policy. "I want to make sure that… if things went *terribly* wrong, that the Purity Front didn't make it out of here alive." I shook my head, grinding my palms against my eyes. "But now even that doesn't fucking matter." I looked up at Atlas and Caden, the defeat sweeping through me like ice in my veins. "Why did we do this? Why did we even think we could stand up to these people? We… We're just a bunch of stupid kids…"

"No," Atlas said firmly, gripping my shoulders. "That's exactly what they want you to think. That we're powerless. That's how they control people, through fear and self-doubt."

Another scream echoed through the mansion, Wild's pain pulsing through our bond like a fresh wound. I doubled over, gasping.

"They're trying to draw us out," Caden said, his nostrils flaring in anger. "Using Wild as bait."

"And it's working," I choked out, straightening with newfound determination. Whoever was dampening the bond between us and Wild, they were allowing his pain through to get to us. "I can't just stand here while they torture him."

Atlas's golden eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "What if we give them what they want?"

"What?" I stared at him.

"They want us to come to them," Atlas explained, his tactical mind working through scenarios. "So we do exactly that. But on our terms."

Caden nodded slowly, understanding dawning across his features. “A false surrender?”

“They expect us to fight,” Atlas continued. “To come in, guns blazing. But what if we don’t? What if we just... walk in?”

I frowned, struggling to follow his logic through the haze of Wild’s pain clouding our bond. “And then what? Let them trap our souls in that thing?”

“No,” Atlas said, a dangerous smile spreading across his face. “The cube sucks up magical beings that get too close. That means they had to turn it off to protect themselves. And even if they had some sort of weird immunity, Wild doesn’t. They would *have* to turn it off to keep Wild close so we couldn’t get to him.” He looked at me, his eyes filled with determination. “If we make them think we’re not gonna fight, we could get close enough to attempt the teleportation spell before they knew what hit them.”

“It’s a massive risk,” Caden said, his amber magic flickering anxiously around his fingers. “If they realize what we’re doing before we can complete the spell...”

“Then we die,” I finished bluntly. “But at least we die trying to save Wild rather than hiding in this library while they torture him.”

Another wave of pain pulsed through our bond, weaker this time. Wild was fading. Whatever they were doing to him was draining his energy rapidly.

“I don’t want to lose him,” I said softly. “He’s my mate, the person in all this world that was meant just for me. I love him so much I can’t breathe.” I reached out, wrapping my arms around Caden and Atlas, pulling them into a tight hug. “But I don’t want to lose you either. I love you both.” I took a deep breath. “But I can’t stand by and do nothing. It’s better to try and fail than to live with the regret.”

Caden pressed a kiss to the side of my neck, his heart hammering in his chest. “I’ll follow you,” he said softly. “Anywhere you want to go.”

“So will I,” Atlas replied, kissing my cheek. “Let’s save our mate.”

There was another shot of pain through the bond, weaker than all the rest. Wild’s magic was fading, his chaos fading into nothingness.

“We need to move now,” I said, straightening my shoulders. “If we’re going to surrender, let’s make it convincing.”

Atlas nodded, his golden eyes fierce with determination. “I’ll lead. You two follow, hands visible, magic suppressed. Make them believe we’ve given up.”

As we moved through the mansion’s corridors, I reached out through our bond, sending every ounce of love and strength I could muster toward Wild. The connection was growing fainter by the second, which only increased my desperation. The Purity Front was still suppressing him, not letting my thoughts through.

The mansion seemed to understand our plan, clearing paths that had been twisted into deadly mazes just minutes before. Through the house’s awareness, I could sense the remaining Purity Front members gathered in the foyer, their magical signatures pulsing with anticipation around the obsidian cube.

And Wild, his bright emerald energy was flickering like a candle in a storm.

When we reached the entrance to the grand foyer, I took a deep breath, steadying myself against the wall. Through the doorway, I could see my father standing beside the cube, his hands raised as he chanted ancient words of binding. Lady Briar held Wild against one of the pillars, magical bonds of emerald light wrapped around his limbs. His head hung forward, blood mixing with the copper hair falling across his face, but I could see the rise and fall of his chest. He was still alive. But barely.

“Remember,” Atlas whispered. “No matter what they say or do, stick to the plan. Get as close to the cube as possible.”

I nodded, swallowing past the lump in my throat. “Let’s go.”

Atlas stepped into the foyer first, his hands raised in surrender. “Stop!” he called out, his voice echoing through the grand space. “We surrender.”

The chanting ceased abruptly as every head turned toward us. My father’s eyes narrowed with suspicion as Caden and I followed Atlas into the room, our hands similarly raised.

“Well,” my father said, his aristocratic features arranged in a mask of smug satisfaction. “My son returns at last. Did you finally come to your senses?”

“Let Wild go,” I said, my voice steadier than I felt. “You have us now. All of us. That’s what you wanted, isn’t it?”

Lady Briar laughed, the sound like breaking glass. “How touchingly naïve. Why would we release our leverage?”

Wild stirred at the sound of my voice, raising his head with obvious effort. Through our bond, I felt a surge of alarm as he realized what we were doing.

“No,” he croaked, blood bubbling at the corner of his mouth. “Elias, don’t—”

Lady Briar silenced him with a casual flick of her wrist, emerald magic tightening around his throat. I fought to keep my expression neutral as rage boiled beneath my skin.

“We’re here now,” I said, taking another careful step forward. “The tetrad bond you’re so afraid of. Isn’t that what you wanted? To destroy it?”

My father studied me with cold calculation, his eyes so similar to mine yet utterly devoid of warmth. “And you expect me

to believe you've simply given up? After all the trouble you've caused?"

"Look at him," I gestured toward Wild, letting genuine anguish color my voice. "You're killing him. What choice do we have?"

Through our bond, I could feel Atlas and Caden moving slowly into position, spreading out just enough to create a triangle around the cube. We needed to be perfectly positioned for the teleportation spell to work.

"A touching sentiment," my father replied, "but forgive me if I remain skeptical of this sudden surrender."

"We've lost," Atlas said, his voice carrying a perfect note of defeat. "Your artifact is too powerful. The mansion can't protect us anymore."

Lady Briar's perfect features twisted with triumph as she gazed at her suffering son. "You see, Wilderain? Your little rebellion was always doomed to fail. If you had simply accepted your place, none of this would have been necessary."

Wild's eyes found mine across the room, pain and fear giving way to fierce determination as he realized what we were attempting. Through our weakened bond, I felt him gathering what little magic remained in his broken body.

"Bind them," my father commanded the remaining Purity Front members. "Start with my son. He will be spared from the ritual."

"What?!" I cried as two robed figures grabbed my arms and forced them behind my back, binding my hands with magic.

"Why would I kill you?" my father replied, a tone of surprise in his voice. "You're still my son. In time, you'll come to understand why the separation of the species is important. And why the mixing of magic, like your *bond,* is dangerous." He took a step forward, a smile on his face. "You'll be the poster child for our movement, the one that saw the error of his ways and converted to the *right* side of things." He took another step, his voice softening. "But most of all, your mother and I want you home, with the family where you belong, Elias."

Rage bubbled beneath my skin like a geyser about to burst. And when I could stand it no longer, my fury exploded outward in a burst of blue light that sent the robed figures holding me flying across the foyer. The magical bonds around my wrists shattered like glass as my power erupted, no longer contained by fear or hesitation.

"You want to know about family?" I snarled, my magic crackling around me like lightning. "These three are my family. Not you. Not anymore. You are the one that's *wrong*, father. People shouldn't be separated or treated as less just because they don't look like you and me. Our bond is stronger because of what we are individually. The fact that we destroyed the majority of your followers without lifting a finger proves that."

My father's eyes widened in shock as he realized the depth of my fury. He looked as if he were about to speak, but my magic flared around me, like blue flames rising up to lick the heavens.

"Grandmother Lydia built this mansion with her bond mates, a fae and a dryad. And people like you *destroyed* her bond and took away her mate." My gaze remained locked on him, dangerous magic with the intent to kill circling around my fingers. "And now you want to turn against our own family? Even when our family namesake is from her mate?"

My father furrowed his brow. "That… That's not true."

"Yes, it is!" I snarled. "Check any book in this house! Tap into the magical foundations of this mansion! All of them were created by Lydia and her mates!"

My father's face paled as the truth sank in, and for the tiniest moment, his resolve faltered. His eyes darted to the cube, then back to me, like he was calculating the risks.

"Enough of this!" Lady Briar shouted, tightening her magical grip on Wild until he gasped for air. "Kill them all now!"

The remaining Purity Front members surged forward, but I was ready for them. I threw my hands forward, letting go of the structure and complicated rituals I'd spent my entire life memorizing. Instead, I gave into emotion, letting my *need* to save Wild and my mates fill me completely.

Bodies flew in all directions, members of the Purity Front thrust backward or torn apart by my magic. Caden and Atlas lashed out at the same moment as well, both of them focusing their efforts on Lady Briar. My father, however, remained motionless, standing next to the cube with a blank look on his face. I stared at him as I sent his minions flying, my eyes never leaving his.

"ENOUGH!" Lady Briar screamed, cutting through all the commotion.

I turned to see both Caden and Atlas blown back by her fae magic, their bodies crashing to the floor. At the same time, she grabbed Wild by the back of the neck, hoisting him high into the air as her full fae form took over.

"I'll kill him!" she screamed, tightening her grasp as her furious gaze found me. Her long claws dug into his neck and blood started to run down his body. She lifted the dampener on our bond, letting all his pain crash through me in an instant. "If you want your mate alive, you'll stop this attack now and turn yourself over!"

I knew she was lying, that she was never going to let us go, least of all Wild. But I couldn't bear the pain coursing through our bond. I wanted to fight, to save him from that crazy bitch. But I couldn't be the reason he died. That was too much to ask.

The magic around me faded, the fire snuffed in an instant by her threats.

"Good boy," Lady Briar purred, her claws still drawing blood from Wild's neck as her hair flowed around her. "Now come to me. Slowly."

I took a hesitant step forward, my hands raised in surrender. Through our bond, I felt Wild's desperate attempt to communicate something, but Lady Briar's magic was interfering with the connection, turning his thoughts into static.

"Elias, don't," Atlas groaned from where he'd fallen, golden eyes blazing with fury even as blood trickled from his mouth.

"I have to," I said quietly, taking another step toward Lady Briar and the cube. "I can't let Wild die."

But as I moved closer, something unexpected happened. My father stepped directly into my path, his face pale and drawn. For the first time since we'd entered the foyer, he looked uncertain.

"Son," he said, his voice softer than I'd heard it in years. "What you said about Lydia... about our family name..."

"It's true," I replied, not breaking my slow advance. "Every word. Her, Sorrel, and Thorne built this place for their research. And a fragment of Thorne, her dryad mate, sacrificed himself to keep us safe."

My father's composure cracked completely, his aristocratic mask slipping to reveal something almost human underneath. "That's... that's impossible. The family records—"

"Were lies," I finished. "Just like everything else the Purity Front taught you. I have grandmother's journal if you want proof."

Lady Briar snarled with impatience. "I don't care about your fucking family history! The boy comes to me now, or his precious mate dies!"

But my father was staring at the cube now, really looking at it for the first time. I could see the moment realization hit him, the way his eyes widened as he took in the writhing souls trapped within the obsidian surface.

"Morgana," he said slowly, using Lady Briar's given name. "How many died to power this thing?"

"As many as necessary," she replied coldly. "The cause demands sacrifice."

"Children?" my father asked, his voice barely a whisper. "Were there children among the sacrifices? I told you no children."

But Lady Briar's silence was answer enough.

I watched my father's world crumble in that moment, watched him truly see what his beliefs had led to. When he looked at me again, his eyes were filled with horror and something that might have been regret.

"Elias," he whispered. "I... I'm so sorry."

"Father—"

"Touching," Lady Briar spat. "But irrelevant. The ritual will be completed with or without your cooperation, Marcus."

She began to chant in an ancient fae tongue, her magic flaring up around her. But before she could get more than a few words in, a red tendril of magic pierced her body, cutting her voice off instantly.

When I looked back, I saw my father, his hand on the cube, red magic swirling around him.

CHAPTER 32

WILD

Red light filled my vision before my mother's clawed hands slipped off my neck. Suddenly I was falling. Everything around me blurred as several things happened at once. I felt my mother's strange magic release its death grip on my link to the tetrad bond. All at once I could feel my mates, their hurt, confusion, and shock as they watched something unexpected take place. Next, I felt the pain of striking a cold stone floor, my body too weak and damaged to do anything to break my fall.

Pain lanced through my body as I hit the marble floor, but the relief of feeling our tetrad bond fully restored was overwhelming. Through the connection, I felt Elias's desperate love and Atlas's protective fury, while Caden's gentle healing magic immediately began flowing toward me. My bruises and cuts began to mend, the pain fading quickly.

Above me, my mother's perfect face was frozen in shock as she stared down at the crimson tendril piercing her chest. Her emerald eyes, so like mine yet devoid of warmth, flickered with disbelief as she looked from the wound to Marcus, Elias's father, who stood with his hand pressed against the obsidian cube.

"You... you dare..." she gasped, her voice barely a whisper as blood began to trickle from the corner of her mouth.

"I won't let you hurt any more children," Marcus said, his aristocratic features twisted with anguish and determination. "This ends now, Morgana. No more. You are finished."

The red magic flowing from the cube intensified, and I could see the strain it was putting on Marcus's body. His face was pale, sweat beading on his forehead as he channeled the artifact's power against my mother, attempting to absorb her magic. But there was something else happening, too. The cube itself was beginning to crack, hairline fractures spreading across its obsidian surface as conflicting magics tore at its structure. It seemed my mother was fighting back.

"Father, stop!" Elias cried out, lurching forward. "The cube will take you too!"

But Marcus didn't release his grip on the obsidian surface. Instead, his fingers seemed to sink deeper into the artifact as more crimson tendrils erupted from its cracking surface, wrapping around his arm like hungry serpents.

I tried to push myself up, but my body refused to cooperate. Through our bond, I felt Elias's panic rising as he realized what his father was doing. He was sacrificing himself to trap my mother's soul, to put an end to this attack, and to save his son from certain destruction.

"Get back!" Atlas roared, diving toward Elias and pulling him away from the increasingly unstable artifact.

My mother's perfect form began to distort, her fae features elongating as she fought against the cube's pull. Her emerald magic flared in desperate bursts, but each flash was weaker than the last as the crimson tendrils drained her essence.

"You fool," she hissed at Marcus, her voice warping into something inhuman. "You don't understand what you've unleashed."

The cube's surface rippled violently, the cracks widening as more souls pressed against its weakening structure from within. I could see faces forming in the obsidian, mouths open in silent screams as they sensed the sweet release of freedom approaching.

"Elias," Marcus gasped, his body trembling with the effort of controlling the artifact. "You need… to get the artifact out of here… now!"

"But it'll kill you!" Elias cried back, reaching out toward his father.

But he just smiled. "Then I will have paid for my sins."

"There has to be another way!"

His father's body was drawn further into the cube, the red magic consuming him up to the shoulder. "Please," he whispered, his voice barely breaking through the commotion. "Before it's too late."

Caden was suddenly beside me, his gentle hands lifting me to a sitting position. "Can you stand?" he whispered urgently.

"I think so," I managed, though my voice sounded like broken glass in my throat.

Through our bond, I felt Elias's magic surge as he reluctantly prepared the teleportation spell we'd planned together, his raw power weaving complex patterns in the air. Atlas and Caden immediately added their energy to his, their magic flowing

through our tetrad connection.

My mother's body was half-absorbed into the cube now, her perfect features contorted with rage and disbelief. "This isn't over," she snarled, her emerald eyes finding mine one last time. "You'll never be free of me, Wilderain."

"Watch me," I whispered, summoning what little strength I had left to add my chaotic energy to the teleportation spell.

Marcus looked at his son with eyes full of regret and something like pride. "I'm sorry, Elias. For everything. Tell your mother..." His voice cracked. "Tell her I was wrong and that I'm sorry."

The cube pulsed with blinding crimson light as it absorbed both my mother and Marcus. The remaining Purity Front members scrambled toward the exits, abandoning their leaders as the artifact's destabilization became impossible to ignore.

"Now!" Elias shouted, his magic reaching critical mass as our combined power surged through the tetrad bond.

The teleportation spell enveloped the cube in a shimmering dome of intertwined energy. Blue from Elias, amber from Caden, gold from Atlas, and emerald from me. The artifact resisted at first, its massive weight and corrupted magic fighting against our spell, but the four of us together were stronger than any individual power.

The cube began to fade, reality bending around it as our magic tore open a rift in space. Through the shimmering portal, I could see the gray emptiness of the deep Veil, far from any sanctuary or settlement.

"Keep going!" Elias gasped, blood trickling from his nose as the strain of the spell pushed him to his limits. "Just a few more seconds!"

My mother's face appeared one last time on the cube's surface, her features twisted with fury as she realized what we were doing. "You cannot escape your nature, Wilderain!" she shrieked. "You are chaos! You will destroy everything you touch! Fae and witches can never be bonded forever!"

"You're wrong," I croaked, my voice barely audible. "And I'll love them all just to prove you wrong."

The cube vanished with a sound like reality tearing, leaving only empty air where it had floated moments before. We all collapsed to our knees, our magic completely spent, gasping for breath in the sudden silence.

Then, a few seconds later, from somewhere deep in the Veil, came a sound like thunder. The mansion shook around us as the explosion reached across dimensions, the cube's destruction sending shockwaves through the realm of the dead. But we were safe, protected by the sanctuary's ancient walls and our own exhausted magic.

"Is it over?" Caden whispered, his blue eyes wide with disbelief.

Before anyone could answer, ethereal servants began materializing around us, their translucent forms more solid than I'd ever seen them. They moved with purpose, tending to our wounds and clearing away the debris left by the battle.

"The mansion says yes," one of them reported, its voice carrying notes of profound relief. "The threat has been neutralized. The sanctuary is secure."

Atlas pulled me into his arms, his golden eyes bright with tears as he held me close. "You're alive," he murmured against my hair. "We're all alive."

Through our bond, I felt Elias's grief for his father mixing with overwhelming relief that we'd survived. Caden's gentle presence wrapped around all of us, his healing magic still flowing to repair the damage we'd sustained.

"The Purity Front?" I asked weakly.

"Gone for now," Atlas replied, glancing toward the shattered entrance. "The survivors fled when Marcus turned on your mother. Without their leaders and their artifact, they're just frightened people running from their consequences."

I closed my eyes, finally allowing myself to believe it was truly over. My mother was gone, trapped forever in the artifact she'd helped create. The tetrad bond that had made us so powerful had also been our salvation, our love for each other giving us strength when everything else failed.

"What happens now?" I whispered.

Elias kneeled down at my side, tears running down his face as he swept me up into his arms. "I don't know, but don't ever leave me like that again," he cried, his voice muffled by my shoulder.

I couldn't help but grin, my arms wrapping around him. "I was kidnapped, Elias. I couldn't help it."

He pulled back, eyes red and furious. "Then don't fucking get kidnapped again, you idiot!"

"I'll try my best," I laughed, wincing as pain shot through my ribs. Even with Caden's healing magic, my body was a constellation of bruises and half-healed wounds.

"That's not funny," Elias muttered, but I could feel his relief flooding our bond, warm and golden like sunshine after a storm. His fingers traced my face gently, as if making sure I was real. "I thought I was going to lose you."

"You can't get rid of me that easily," I said, leaning into his touch. "It'll take more than my psychotic mother and a soul-sucking cube to separate us."

Atlas moved closer, his protective energy wrapping around all of us like a shield. "The mansion's sending out distress signals now that the dampening field is gone. Help should be arriving soon."

As if summoned by his words, the air near the shattered entrance began to shimmer and distort. A portal opened, revealing several armed magicians, Councilors Ashwick and Vael, and leading the charge was Professor Blackwood.

"Always late to the party," I called, letting my head fall against Elias's chest. "Where the hell were you an hour ago?"

Professor Blackwood rushed forward, her normally composed features twisted with concern as she surveyed the destruction around us. “We came as soon as we could break through the interference. The entire Veil was locked down by something powerful.”

“The Cube of Binding,” Elias explained, his voice hoarse as he continued to hold me against his chest. “It’s been destroyed now.”

Councilor Ashwick stepped carefully over the rubble, his silver robes flowing around him as he approached. “We felt the explosion from three realms away. What exactly happened here?”

Atlas shifted protectively closer to us. “The Purity Front brought a soul prison to trap us. They didn’t count on us fighting back.”

“Or on my father sacrificing himself to stop them and Lady Briar,” Elias added quietly, his grief pulsing through our bond.

Professor Blackwood knelt beside us, her hands already glowing with healing magic as she assessed our injuries. “What happened to Lady Briar?”

“Gone,” I managed, wincing as her magic probed a particularly tender spot on my ribs. “Absorbed into the cube along with Elias’s father before we teleported it deep into the Veil.”

The councilors exchanged alarmed glances. “You teleported an unstable blood magic artifact into the Veil?” Councilor Vael asked, her pristine eyebrows nearly disappearing into her hairline.

“It was that or let it explode in here with us,” Caden replied, his gentle voice carrying unexpected authority. “We didn’t have many options.”

More magicians were streaming through the portal now, medics rushing to our sides while security personnel from Widdershins Academy spread throughout the mansion, checking for remaining threats. I felt Elias’s grip on me tighten as they approached, his protective instinct flaring despite his exhaustion.

“It’s okay,” I whispered, reaching up to touch his face. “They’re here to help.”

Professor Blackwood stood, addressing the councilors with a fierce expression I’d never seen on her before. “These students need immediate medical attention, not an interrogation. The debriefing can wait.”

“Of course,” Councilor Ashwick nodded, though his shrewd eyes continued to assess the surrounding damage. “But we’ll need full statements from all of them once they’re stable. The Purity Front attacking a hidden sanctuary in the Veil is unprecedented. The Council will want answers.”

“They’ll get them,” Atlas growled, helping Caden to his feet as medics surrounded us with stretchers and healing potions. “But first, we rest.”

I felt myself being lifted onto a stretcher, Elias refusing to let go of my hand even as they began to move me toward the portal. Through our tetrad bond, I could feel all three of my mates’ exhaustion mingling with relief and lingering fear.

“Stay with me,” I murmured to Elias, suddenly afraid we’d be separated at the hospital.

“Always,” he smiled. “I’m never leaving your side again.”

I squeezed his hand, love flowing through the bond.

“Hey Professor?” I called, beckoning her over.

“Yes, Mr. Briar Hall?”

“Do me a favor and have them take me to the infirmary,” I said, a mischievous grin filling my face. “If you ever tell anyone about this, I’ll deny it, but…” I let out a long sigh. “I want to go back to the academy.”

“Of course,” she smiled. “I’ll make sure we have the best clerics in all the realms bringing the four of you back to perfect health.”

“Thanks.”

She gave the four of us a nod as we headed for the portal, Elias’s hand still holding mine as I was carried on the stretcher.

“I love you, Elias,” I said softly. “More than anything.”

“I love you too, Wild.” He glanced up at Caden and Atlas, the pair of them hand in hand as well. “I love all of you.”

CHAPTER 33

ELIAS

Despite all odds, we'd survived.

And for the past week, all four of us had been living in the Widdershins Academy infirmary, recovering from our battle with the Purity Front. The infirmary had become our temporary home, with four beds arranged in a square so we could always see each other. Professor Blackwood had made sure we weren't separated, understanding that our tetrad bond needed proximity to properly heal. The clerics had worked around the clock to repair the damage. Wild had several broken ribs and internal injuries from his mother's torture, Atlas's concussion from being thrown against the wall, while Caden and I were recovering from magical exhaustion.

But the physical wounds were healing faster than the emotional ones.

Wild had barely spoken about his mother since we'd returned. I could feel his conflicted emotions through our bond. He was relieved that she was gone, but there was also a deep grief that surprised him. Despite everything she'd done, she'd still been the woman who'd raised him, who'd taught him his first spells, who'd once read him bedtime stories. The betrayal cut deeper than any physical wound. Despite her cold demeanor, she had still been family that Wild trusted once.

"You don't have to pretend you're not sad," I said quietly, reaching across the space between our beds to take his hand. "She was still your mother, regardless of what she became."

Wild's emerald eyes met mine, raw with pain he'd been trying to hide. "I know I should hate her. After what she did to us, to you..." His voice cracked. "But I keep remembering when I was little, before the politics consumed everything. She used to take me to the gardens and teach me how to make flowers bloom out of season."

Through our bond, I felt Atlas and Caden's gentle support flowing toward Wild, their love wrapping around him like a protective embrace. We'd all lost something in that mansion. Wild lost his mother, me, my father, and all of us the naivety that our tetrad bond made us invincible. If anything, our fight with the Purity Front had proven quite the opposite. We were in more danger than ever.

"I had no idea my father was even part of the Purity Front," I admitted, my thumb tracing circles on Wild's palm. "Before this, he used to help me with my homework. He'd get so excited when I mastered a new spell structure." I swallowed hard. "In the end, he tried to save us. That has to count for something."

A soft knock interrupted our conversation. Professor Blackwood entered, carrying a tea service that smelled of healing herbs and something else, something that made my magic hum with recognition.

"How are you feeling today?" she asked, setting the tray on a side table before moving to check each of us in turn.

"Better," Atlas replied, though his golden eyes remained troubled. "The headaches are mostly gone."

"And the tetrad bond?" Professor Blackwood asked, her gaze moving between us with professional interest. "Any lingering effects from the artifact?"

I exchanged glances with my mates, feeling the steady pulse of our connection. If anything, the bond felt stronger than before, tempered by the crucible of our shared trauma and survival.

"It's stable," I said. "More than stable, actually. The experience seems to have deepened our connection."

Professor Blackwood nodded, satisfaction evident in her expression. "That's precisely what I hoped to hear. Bonds like yours grow stronger through adversity. It's one of the fundamental principles of magical theory that's often overlooked in academic settings."

She poured four cups of the fragrant tea, adding a drop of golden liquid from a small vial into each. The scent intensified, reminding me of sunshine on fresh moss and something ancient I couldn't quite place.

"Drink," she instructed, handing each of us a cup. "It's a restorative blend with a couple drops of powered unicorn horn. Extremely rare, but the Council deemed your recovery... priority."

Wild raised an eyebrow, accepting his cup with suspicion. "The Council? The same people who've been questioning us daily about what happened? Since when do they care about our wellbeing? They didn't even come check on us at the mansion."

“Since you four became the first documented tetrad bond in over three centuries to survive a direct magical assault,” Professor Blackwood replied matter-of-factly. “And since you destroyed an artifact that, by all accounts, should have been impossible to defeat.” She paused for a moment, looking him over. “But you’re right. They should’ve checked on you. I can understand your frustration. I myself expected you to be better looked after by the Elder Council.”

I sipped the tea, feeling immediate warmth spreading through my limbs. The magic in the unicorn horn resonated with our bond, strengthening the connections between us. Through our shared awareness, I could feel the others experiencing the same sensation, like sunshine flowing through veins that had been filled with ice.

“There’s something you’re not telling us,” Atlas said, his golden eyes studying Professor Blackwood with the intensity of his werewolf nature. “You’ve been visiting us every day, bringing special remedies, keeping the Council from interrogating us too harshly. Why?”

Professor Blackwood sighed, pulling up a chair between our beds. For a moment, she looked older, the lines around her eyes deepening with memories I couldn’t read.

“Because I’ve seen what happens when a powerful bond is left vulnerable after trauma,” she said quietly. “And because I made a promise to someone very dear to me that I would protect the next generation that found themselves in this position.”

“Lydia,” I whispered, understanding dawning. “You knew her.”

Professor Blackwood’s eyes widened slightly. “How did you—”

“I met Thorne,” I interjected, sitting up straighter despite the looks from the others. I hadn’t told them about him yet. “Well, what was left of him, anyway. He helped me rewire the mansion’s defenses.”

The professor’s teacup clattered against its saucer. “Thorne? But that’s impossible. He died decades ago.”

“Not completely,” I said softly. “A fragment of him remained bound to the mansion. He sacrificed what was left of himself to help us.”

Tears gathered in Professor Blackwood’s eyes before she blinked them away with practiced composure. “I see. That... explains much about how you managed to survive.” She took a steadying breath. “Lydia was my mentor. After she lost both her bond mates, she dedicated her life to teaching others in secret about the power and vulnerability of magical bonds. She made me promise that if I ever encountered another group like yours, I would do everything in my power to protect them from the forces that destroyed her happiness.”

Through our tetrad bond, I felt Wild’s curiosity spike alongside my own. The pieces were finally falling into place. It explained why Professor Blackwood had been so invested in our success, why she’d pushed us together despite the academy’s policies, and why she’d fought so hard to keep us safe.

“She trained you,” Caden said, his gentle voice carrying certainty. “That’s why you understand our bond so well.”

“She did more than train me,” Professor Blackwood replied, her composed mask slipping to reveal deep affection. “She saved my life. I was a scholarship student from the human world with very little power and completely overwhelmed by the magical world. Lydia took me under her wing, taught me not just magic but how to navigate the politics that could destroy someone like me. It’s because of her that I’ve become a great witch. "

Wild leaned forward, wincing slightly as his ribs protested the movement. “Someone like you?”

“A half-blood,” she said simply. “My father was human, my mother a witch. In those days, that made me an outcast in both worlds. The Purity Front’s ideology isn’t new, Wild. They’ve been spreading their poison for generations.”

The weight of her words settled over us like a shroud. Through our bond, I felt Atlas’s protective instincts flare at the thought of anyone persecuting Professor Blackwood for something she couldn’t control.

“But you became a professor,” I pointed out. “You achieved everything despite their prejudice.”

“Because Lydia fought for me,” she replied, her voice thick with emotion. “She used her family’s influence to get me accepted into advanced programs, vouched for my character when others questioned my loyalty, and tried to teach me to be proud of what I was rather than ashamed. I’m sorry to say that I forgot her teachings and became mired in my self-loathing.”

She stood, smoothing her robes with hands that trembled slightly. “When she died, I lost my way completely. As Mr. Cromwell well knows, I was preaching ideals of the Purity Front in my classes at the beginning of the term last year.”

The entire room took in a sharp breath.

“But you figured it out in the end,” Caden said. “And you helped us survive this year.”

Blackwood nodded. “I’m glad I found my way back to the light, away from the self-loathing. After the incident with your father last year, I knew I had to do better, to put a stop to all this. So, when I sensed the formation of your tetrad bond, I knew fate had given me the chance to fulfill that promise.”

“The Council doesn’t know about your connection to her, do they?” Atlas asked, his tactical mind working through the implications.

“They know I studied under her, but not the extent of our relationship or the promises I made.” Professor Blackwood’s expression grew serious. “Which brings me to why I’m really here today. The Council has made a decision about your future.”

My stomach dropped. Through our bond, I felt my mates’ similar dread as we waited for whatever verdict had been reached about our lives.

"They want to study us," I said flatly. "Turn us into some kind of magical experiment."

"No," Professor Blackwood replied. "They want you to disappear."

I stared at her in disbelief. "They… They're going to kill us?"

"Not exactly," she said, shaking her head. "They want you to go back to the mansion in the Veil and stay there without finishing your education at the Academy. And they are willing to cover all your needs for the rest of your lives. Anything you want will be delivered to the mansion without question."

"What's the catch?" Wild scoffed, crossing his arms over his chest.

"You have to be ready to fight again," she said, looking at each of us in turn. "Against the Purity Front or any other group that would be considered a threat to the paranormal world."

"A life of luxury," Caden sighed. "In exchange for being on-call soldiers for the rest of our lives. Great."

"Caden and I already have a house waiting for us," Atlas said. "A gift from my father. And I'm expected to run the pack when he retires. I can't just leave all that behind."

"I'm not sure you have much choice, Mr. Faolan," the professor sighed. "The Elder Council's decisions are absolute. Neither you nor your father will be able to go against their wishes. At least not right away." She turned her attention back to me, her eyes sparkling mischievously. "But should you find a way to bring an end to the Purity Front…"

"Then we could have our lives back," I finished.

"Not completely," she smiled. "Your tetrad bond will continue for the rest of your lives. The celestial alignment occurred while you were in the Veil." Her cheeks turned red as she moved her gaze to the floor. "I can only assume that you all… *completed* your bond during the alignment without realizing it."

"I was wondering about that!" Wild cried. "I kept wondering about that prophecy and all the celestial bullshit. But we couldn't see the stars in the Veil."

"It happened about three days before the attack on the Mansion," she said.

"Yep," Wild grinned. "That was the night of the foursome."

"By the gods…" I sighed, grinding my palms against my hands in embarrassment. "Wild… *please*…"

Professor Blackwood cleared her throat, her cheeks flushing deeper crimson. "Yes, well... the physical consummation would have sealed the bond permanently during the alignment. The stars were in perfect position, even if you couldn't see them."

"So, we're stuck with each other," Atlas said, though the warmth in his voice and through our bond belied any complaint. "Forever."

"That's not so bad," Caden murmured, his gentle blue eyes finding each of us in turn.

Wild laughed, wincing slightly as his ribs protested. "Are you kidding? It's the best thing that's ever happened to me."

The raw honesty in his voice made my heart ache with love. Through our bond, I felt the same emotion echoed back from all three of them, pure, unfiltered affection that made the prospect of exile seem almost bearable if we faced it together.

"So that's it?" I asked Professor Blackwood. "We go back to the mansion and wait until the Council needs us to fight?"

She hesitated, glancing toward the door before leaning closer. "Not necessarily. The Council's decision is... flexible, for those who know how to navigate it."

"What do you mean?" Atlas asked, his golden eyes narrowing.

"I mean," she continued in a near whisper, "that while you must officially reside at the mansion, there are ways to... move about discreetly. Ways that Lydia perfected during her time there."

Wild sat up straighter, wincing again. "Secret passages? Portals?"

"Something like that," Professor Blackwood nodded. "The mansion exists in multiple places simultaneously. It's anchored in the Veil, yes, but it also has... doorways. Lydia designed it that way, to maintain her research connections while pretending to be nothing more than the matriarch of the Thorne family."

Hope flickered through our bond like wildfire. "So we could still visit our friends?" Caden asked. "Still have some semblance of normal lives?"

"With caution, yes," she confirmed. "The Council doesn't need to know everything about how you spend your time, so long as you fulfill your obligations when called upon."

I squeezed Wild's hand, feeling his excitement building through our connection. "And our education?" I asked. "We still have so much to learn."

Professor Blackwood smiled, looking more like herself than she had since entering the room. "I believe certain faculty members could be persuaded to continue your training... unofficially, of course."

"You'd do that for us?" Caden asked.

"It's what Lydia would have wanted," she replied simply. "And frankly, it's what you deserve after what you've been through."

"When do we meet with the Council?" I asked, feeling the agreement from the other three through our bond.

"Tomorrow morning," she nodded. "After that, you'll pack your things and move to the mansion permanently."

I turned to Wild, reaching out and lacing my fingers through his. “As long as we’re together, that’s all I care about.” My gaze was fixed on those mischievous green eyes of his. “All I want is to be with my family. My *chosen* family.”

EPILOGUE: WILD

Nothing mattered in the entire world except for the heavy, thick cock resting on my tongue.

I moaned around Elias's length, the vibrations making him shudder above me. His fingers tangled in my hair, not forcing but guiding as I took him deeper. The taste of him, salt and musk and something wonderfully magical, flooded my senses.

"Fuck," he breathed, his voice rough with desire. "You look so beautiful like this, Wild."

Behind me, I felt Caden's hands on my hips, his cock pressing against my entrance. He'd already prepared me with his fingers and tongue until I was trembling with need. He pushed forward slowly, stretching me open with delicious pressure that sent shivers streaking through my entire body.

"Fuck," Atlas groaned from beside us, his hand working his own shaft as he watched. "You look incredible taking them both at the same time."

I whimpered around Elias as Caden filled me completely, the dual sensations overwhelming. Every nerve ending sparked with pleasure as they found their rhythm. Elias's cock slid deeper into my throat while Caden thrust into me from behind. I'd never felt anything so wonderful in my entire life.

The atrium around us was alive with magic, vines and flowers blooming in response to our passion. Moonlight filtered through the freshly enchanted ceiling, casting silver patterns across our entwined bodies.

"My turn," Atlas said, his voice thick with want. Caden pulled out reluctantly, and I felt the loss immediately before Atlas took his place, his cock even thicker, stretching me in new ways.

The musky scent of arousal filled my nostrils as I eagerly looked up at the ebony-haired god towering above me. His intense blue eyes, like the depths of a raging sea, bore into mine, his desire for me palpable. He gripped my hair roughly, angling his cock so that the thick vein rubbed against my most sensitive spot. My cock, hard and aching in anticipation, throbbed between my legs as I took him deeper into my mouth. I moaned around his girth, feeling myself salivate with wanton need.

"Oh fuck, Wild," my mate groaned above me, his normally composed demeanor unraveling before my very eyes. "You're driving me insane." His hips began to rock in shallow thrusts, fucking my mouth with slow, deliberate strokes. His hand left my hair and trailed down my back, fingers digging deliciously into my skin.

The pleasure coursing through me was almost too much to bear. I wanted him inside of me too, wanted to feel his thick length stretching me open as he claimed every inch of me. I whimpered around his cock, silently begging for more. Elias growled low in his throat, giving a knowing look to Atlas, who'd been feeling everything through the bond as well.

"Don't worry, baby," Atlas growled, fucking me harder. "By the end of this, you'll have three loads leaking out of that gorgeous ass of yours."

I couldn't help but moan at his words, my body clenching around his massive cock as he thrust deeper. The raw, animalistic energy of the werewolf behind me was intoxicating, so different from Elias's controlled power or Caden's gentle touch. Atlas fucked like he was claiming territory, each powerful thrust marking me as his.

"That's right," he growled, his fingers digging into my hips hard enough to leave bruises. "Take it all."

Elias's cock slipped from my mouth as my head fell forward, overwhelmed by the sensations. He knelt down, lifting my chin to meet his gaze. His eyes were dark with lust, but beneath that burned something deeper, something that made my chest ache with emotion.

"You're magnificent, love," he whispered, brushing his thumb across my bottom lip. "Look at you taking him so well."

Caden moved beside us, his cock still slick and hard. He ran his fingers through my hair, gentle in contrast to Atlas's roughness. "Can I..." he started, uncharacteristically bold.

"Yes," I gasped between thrusts. "Anything. Everything."

He guided his cock back to my lips, and I opened eagerly for him. The taste of myself on him was intoxicating, a reminder of how he'd filled me moments before, but still needed to cum. I moaned around him as Atlas hit that perfect spot deep inside me, sending sparks of pleasure coursing through my body.

The plants around us responded to our magic, vines curling along the floor, flowers blooming out of season. The ceiling above showed not just the night sky but shooting stars streaking across the darkness, responding to the energy we were creating.

Atlas's rhythm grew erratic, his breathing harsh. "Gonna fill you up," he grunted, his fingers tightening on my hips. With a roar that sounded more wolf than man, he slammed deep inside me one final time, his cock pulsing as he came. The sensation of his hot seed flooding me pushed me closer to the edge.

He stayed inside me for a moment, catching his breath before slowly withdrawing. I whimpered at the loss, feeling his cum beginning to leak down my thighs.

"My turn again," Caden said, his voice surprisingly commanding. He pulled out of my mouth and moved behind me. "Is this okay?" he asked, pressing the head of his cock against my entrance, already slick with Atlas's release.

"Please," I begged, beyond shame or hesitation. "Fill me again."

He slid in easily, groaning at the wet heat. "Gods, you feel amazing," he whispered, setting a gentler pace than Atlas, but no less intense. His hands caressed my back, my sides, touching me like I was something precious.

Elias positioned himself in front of me again, his cock level with my face. "Look at me," he commanded softly. When I met his gaze, the love I saw there took my breath away. His magic wrapped around us like silk, amplifying every sensation through our bond.

I took him into my mouth again, hollowing my cheeks as Caden thrust into me with increasing urgency. The dual stimulation had me trembling, my own neglected cock dripping steadily onto the soft moss beneath us.

"So perfect," Elias murmured, his control finally cracking as his hips began to move. "I could watch you like this forever."

Through our tetrad bond, I could feel all of their pleasure mixing with my own. Atlas's satisfied contentment as he watched, Caden's building desperation, and Elias's overwhelming love threaded through his desire. The magical feedback loop intensified everything until I wasn't sure where I ended and they began.

Caden's gentle rhythm grew more urgent. "Wild, I'm—" He didn't finish the sentence before he was spilling inside me with a broken moan, adding his release to Atlas's. The sensation of being filled again, marked by another of my mates, sent electricity racing through my veins.

Elias pulled back from my mouth, helping me sit up as Caden slowly withdrew. I was shaking, overwhelmed by sensation and emotion, cum leaking from me onto the enchanted floor, where flowers immediately bloomed in response to our mixed essence.

"My turn," Elias said, his voice rough with need. "I want to feel you around me."

He lay back on the soft moss, pulling me forward to straddle him. I sank onto his cock with a gasp, already stretched and slick from my other mates. The angle hit different spots inside me, making me arch my back as pleasure shot through my core.

"That's it," he breathed, hands on my hips as I began to move. "Ride me, beautiful."

I rolled my hips, finding a rhythm that had us both moaning. Atlas and Caden moved closer, their hands roaming over my skin as I moved above Elias. The combination of being watched and touched by all three of them was intoxicating.

"Look at the stars," Caden whispered in my ear, his fingers wrapping around my neglected cock.

I glanced up at the enchanted ceiling, gasping at what I saw. The night sky was alive with shooting stars, constellations spinning in impossible patterns that matched the rhythm of our lovemaking. The magic we were creating together was literally rewriting the heavens above us.

"We did that," Elias said, following my gaze. "Our bond, our love… it's changing the enchantment."

His words pushed me over the edge. With a cry that echoed through the atrium, I came hard, spilling over Caden's hand as my body clenched around Elias. The intensity of my orgasm triggered his own, and I felt him pulse inside me, adding his release to the others.

I collapsed forward onto his chest, completely spent and panting. Through our bond, I felt a serene contentment wash over all four of us, a perfect harmony that transcended the physical.

Atlas and Caden settled beside us, their hands still caressing wherever they could reach. We lay there in a tangle of limbs, catching our breath as the magical ceiling continued its celestial dance above us.

"I never want to leave this moment," I whispered against Elias's chest, feeling his heartbeat gradually slow beneath my cheek.

"We don't have to," he murmured, his fingers tracing lazy patterns along my spine. "The mansion is ours now. We can stay here forever if we want."

I lifted my head to look at him, taking in the love shining in his dark eyes. "Even with the Council watching our every move?"

"Fuck the Council," Atlas growled softly, his large hand coming to rest on the small of my back. "They can't control what happens inside these walls."

Caden laughed, the sound like music in the quiet atrium. "I never thought I'd hear you talk like that about them."

"Things change," Atlas replied, his golden eyes reflecting the starlight above. "People change. I've changed."

I couldn't help but smile at that. The rigid Alpha werewolf I'd first met would never have dreamed of defying the Council

or participating in what we'd just done with his mate. Our bond had transformed him as surely as it had transformed all of us.

"Look," Elias whispered, pointing upward.

Above us, the enchanted ceiling was shifting again. The stars were arranging themselves into new patterns, constellations I'd never seen before. Four bright stars moved closer together until they formed a perfect diamond in the center of the sky, pulsing with the combined colors of our magic. Blue, amber, red, and emerald.

"It's us," Caden breathed in wonder. "The enchantment is recognizing our bond."

I watched in awe as smaller stars began to orbit our constellation, forming intricate patterns that seemed to tell a story. The ceiling was no longer mimicking the night sky. It was creating something new, something that belonged solely to us.

"The mansion remembers," Elias said softly. "Thorne's sacrifice wasn't in vain. His magic lives on through this place. Through us."

I felt a lump form in my throat at the mention of Thorne. Though I'd never met the dryad whose fragment had helped save us, I felt connected to him through Elias's memories and through the mansion itself.

"Do you think..." I began hesitantly, "do you think he knew this would happen? That we'd end up here together?"

Elias's arms tightened around me. "I think he hoped. Just like Lydia hoped. They built this place as a sanctuary for those who needed it most." He looked up at our constellation, his eyes reflecting the magical light. "I think they'd be proud to see what we've become."

A warm breeze stirred through the atrium, carrying the scent of night-blooming jasmine and something else, something that felt ancient and approving somehow. The surrounding plants seemed to pulse with life, their leaves rustling in harmony with our breathing.

"We should probably clean up," Caden said eventually, though he made no move to get up from where he was curled up between Atlas and I.

"In a minute," I murmured, not wanting to break the spell of this perfect moment. "I just want to stay like this a little longer."

Atlas chuckled, his deep voice rumbling through his chest. "The servants will handle it. They always do."

As if summoned by his words, several ethereal servants materialized at the edge of the atrium, but they kept their distance, waiting patiently for us to be ready. There was something different about them now. They seemed more solid, more present than before.

"They're stronger," Elias observed, following my gaze. "Our bond is feeding the mansion's magic, making everything more powerful."

"Including us," I added, feeling the steady thrum of our connection beneath my skin. Even exhausted and sated, I could sense the vast potential flowing between the four of us.

"We should probably talk about what comes next," Atlas said, his practical nature asserting itself even in this intimate moment. "The Council won't wait forever for an answer."

I groaned, burying my face against Elias's chest. "Do we have to think about that now? Can't we just pretend the outside world doesn't exist for a few more hours?"

"Unfortunately, no," Elias replied gently, his fingers still tracing patterns on my skin. "But whatever we decide, we decide together. The four of us, always."

"Together," Caden echoed, his hand finding mine and squeezing.

"Always," Atlas confirmed, his voice carrying the weight of a solemn vow.

I lifted my head to look at each of them in turn, my heart swelling with so much love I thought it might burst. Whatever challenges lay ahead, whatever the Council demanded of us, we would face it as one. Our bond had been forged in fire and blood, tested by loss and betrayal, and it had emerged stronger than ever.

Above us, our constellation pulsed brighter, as if responding to my thoughts. The mansion itself seemed to wrap around us like a protective embrace, promising safety and sanctuary for as long as we needed it.

"I love you," I whispered, the words encompassing all three of them. "All of you. Forever."

"Forever," they echoed back, and in that moment, surrounded by magic and starlight and the warmth of their bodies against mine, I knew that whatever the future held, we would face it together.

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NEXT IN SERIES: BEASTKIN

A cursed Beastkin. A witch born of fire. A bond neither of them expected… and a love too dangerous to ignore.

Karrick:

Beastkin aren't meant to fall in love with witches. That's what the world tells me. My kind carries a curse—once human, now creatures of claw and fang, feared for a past drenched in war and betrayal. At Widdershins Academy, I'm the monster they all pretend not to watch.

Except for him.

Phoenix Emberwood—the boy who was once my best friend. The boy I lost when his family ripped him away. He's back now, fire magic at his fingertips, stronger, sharper, and looking at me like he's trying to decide if he still knows me at all.

I've only ever been with women. I never questioned that—never questioned myself. But when I see him, when I smell him, something inside me shifts, something primal and undeniable. It's impossible. It's forbidden.

And I want him anyway.

Loving Phoenix means turning my back on everything I know. It means facing a world that would rather see us apart—if not dead. But I'm not sure I can walk away. Not this time.

Phoenix:

I never thought I'd see Karrick again. I never thought I'd return to a world where witches whisper warnings about Beastkin, about the creatures who were cursed for a reason.

But here I am, and there he is—bigger, stronger, impossible to ignore.

My family says I should stay away. The academy says I should know better. But my magic doesn't listen. It flares every time he's near, like it knows him, like it's reaching for something lost.

I tell myself he's just a childhood memory. I tell myself I don't care. But when he looks at me, when our bodies collide in fleeting touches and unspoken confessions, I feel it.

The bond. The pull. The fire waiting to consume us both.

Giving in to Karrick means defying my family, my coven, the very laws that keep our world from falling apart. But maybe the only way to change history… is to burn it down.

Beastkin is a spellbinding, fated-mates romance filled with longing, forbidden passion, and a love strong enough to defy history itself. Perfect for readers who crave fiery tension, slow-burn desire, and the kind of connection that refuses to be denied.

About the Author

Blake R. Wolfe

Blake R. Wolfe has adored werewolves and monsters since he was a child growing up in a small rural Michigan town. Now he lives near the shores of Lake Michigan with his two partners, two cats that need to be fed every three seconds, and a dog that is very spoiled. He spends most of his free time hiking through the nearby forest, thinking up the next great romance story for his readers.

Blake writes under three separate Pen Names:

--Blake R. Wolfe -- Gay Paranormal Romance

--Atreus Rosewood -- Gay Contemporary Romance

--Eoghan R. Cunningham -- LGBTQ+ Fantasy

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